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KELAT AND ABIVERD FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF DEREGUEZ

CLOUDS IN THE EAST:

Travels and Adventures

ON THE

PERSO-TURKOMAN FRONTIER.

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By VALENTINE BAKER.

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFACE.

Recent events have brought the whole Eastern question so prominently forward, that I have not considered myself justified in withholding special information that may be interesting and important.

I have preferred to separate the Political and Strategical Report, which concludes this volume, from the mere record of travel; and although that Report was written more than a year ago, and that lapse of time has made some slight alteration in its details, the conclusions arrived at have only been strengthened, and it has been left in its original form.

It has been my endeavour to prove that the distant clouds which threaten our possessions in the East arise, not from any abstract or proximate danger of a Russian conquest of India, but from the probability of our territory becoming conterminous with that of the greatest military Power.

Such a contingency must entail a rivalry that

would be disastrous to the interests of our Indian Empire. As England owes her great prosperity to natural insulation, so should she preserve if possible that sea of desert that has hitherto given to India the same advantages.

When the boundaries of vast empires are contiguous, they have to be guarded by large armies. The present state of Europe proves conclusively the serious strain that this imposes upon a nation's resources, and the happy immunity which we still enjoy.

In urging that we should strive to preserve that immunity, I do not stand alone: the same opinion has been even more strongly advanced by the greatest living authority on Central Asia—Sir Henry Rawlinson; and it is held, I believe, by all who have a special and personal knowledge of that region. It is only the mere theorists who advocate a policy of passive inaction.

If the views I have enunciated sometimes seem to press hardly upon Russia, they certainly proceed from no ill feeling towards that country.

No one has a higher admiration than myself for the energy, determination, and perseverance of the Great Northern Power, and few can have so many acts of genial kindness and hospitality to be grateful

for. But I cannot allow the influence of personal friendship to blind me to dangers that menace my own country; and every true friend to Russia must desire that the difficulties which loom in the future may be met whilst there is yet time, and not postponed until, from the force of circumstances, they imperil her relations with England, and bring incalculable disasters upon the world.

THE AUTHOR.

LONDON, *March*, 1876.

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CLOUDS IN THE EAST.

INTRODUCTION.

In the early part of the year 1873, England laboured under a severe fit of political excitement.

It had become known for some time past that Russia was planning an Expedition against Khiva, which was to be despatched on its difficult journey in the coming spring. It was not the first Expedition which had been directed against that isolated and barbarous oasis in the Central Asian wilds; and Russia, for years past, had been moving southwards with giant strides without producing more than a passing comment. But now the British Press and the British people appeared suddenly to have discovered that a great danger menaced our Indian Empire, and the leading newspapers teemed with spirited articles on the all-absorbing question of the day.

Wyld and Stanford, as usual, were promptly equal to the occasion, and their shop-windows soon displayed all the available geographical knowledge of the little-known regions. Men talked wisely and learnedly in the Clubs of the Amoo Darya, the Sir Darya, and the Attrek. Khiva and Bokhara, Usbegs, and Turkomans became as

household words throughout the country. But what was most surprising in this sudden fit of national excitement was the bold and warlike tone adopted by representative newspapers of nearly all shades of political opinion. It was declared that this Expedition was a direct menace to our Indian supremacy; that Russia had reached the utmost limit of her advances; and that her onward course must now be checked—at all costs and at all hazards.

It was sad indeed to see in England such a lapse from all the virtuous lessons that had been inculcated by her rulers in latter years. Had she not been tutored to have no concern in the politics of the other great European powers, and taught that even her Colonial Empire was rather an encumbrance than an advantage? And had not England accepted these lessons in a spirit of humility and contrition for past lapses and longings after national greatness? Corfu had been yielded up to prove the sincerity of her conversion; the Black Sea Treaty had been torn up before her eyes, and she had made no sign. She had been put through a course of arbitration, which had been borne with exemplary meekness, and had seemed to be at length convinced that a diet of political water-gruel in foreign affairs was more suited to her constitution than the high-blooded food of national energy to which British nature in the past had been too often prone! Yet, here was the old Adam bursting forth on the slightest provocation, and in relation to a little-known district, encompassed by the great deserts of the East, and, apparently of no importance either commercially or strategically. There could be no doubt about it; the British Lion was getting morosely bellicose—and Russia awoke to the fact.

And then, when the excitement was at its height, and

even war seemed almost imminent, a peaceful and a hopeful rumour quickly spread. A Russian statesman, with a European reputation for urbanity and tact, had suddenly arrived, and was in close and earnest conclave with the Foreign Minister. The papers wrote in a subdued and temperate spirit, as if any violence of language might disturb the two diplomatists in the seclusion of their secret deliberations; and Parliament, which was then sitting, accepted, as it always does, the grave request of the Premier not to complicate the pending negociations by any premature controversy. But it waited anxiously for the result, and showed some little ebullitions of inquietude.

At last the important night arrived; and, when the Minister came down to the House, it was known at once that oil had been thrown upon the troubled waters.

Nothing could be more satisfactory than the explanation! Both the strength and the motives of the Expedition had been immensely exaggerated. Only a few companies and some *sotnias* of Cossacks were to be employed. It was undertaken in a purely humanitarian spirit, and without the slightest idea of an extension of territory. Russia, in fact, would pledge herself to retire altogether, directly the laudable object had been accomplished, and her suffering countrymen released from bondage.

The next morning the leading journals burst forth in benevolent and peaceful articles. Exeter Hall patted the Czar upon the back for his anti-slavery proclivities; and an unusually large fire soon absorbed all the national attention.

The Oxus and the Attrek were now rarely mentioned; the maps slowly disappeared from the shop-windows; and England slumbered once again.

But, in the minds of those who were responsible for a strategical knowledge of the countries in question, the subject, once awakened, did not die away so easily. It had been discovered that we were in a lamentable state of ignorance relative to the geography of the region which lies south of the Amoo Darya.

For what was the actual knowledge derived from personal surveys which was available as to that North Afghan and North Persian frontier? Burnes and Ferrier had passed up from Herat by Khoondooz and Balkh. Abbot and Taylor Thompson had marched by Sarakhs and Merv on their journeys to Khiva. Vámbéry, landing at Gemushtepe on the Caspian, and exploring that neighbourhood, had pushed on to Khiva and Bokhara, and returned by the Moorghab to Herat. But all these famous travellers had only crossed the frontier-line, journeying from south to north or from north to south, and had not traversed it laterally. The North Persian frontier, from Sarakhs to the neighbourhood of the Caspian, was absolutely untravelled, and unknown except from the vague and untrustworthy reports which had been gathered from Persian sources.

It was supposed that Markosoff's recent Expedition must have done something to clear up the mystery, but the results were still a secret. Baillie Fraser, Burnes and others had passed westward from Meshed through the broad and fertile valley leading by Koochan, Boognoord and the Gourgan to Astrabad. They had seen mountains lying to the right of their route, but what lay beyond those mountains was veiled in utter obscurity. And yet it was through this unknown region that Russian advances from the Caspian to Herat were asserted to be feasible.

By some the river Attrek was said to rise near

Merv, and Russian maps encouraged the delusion and marked it as their boundary line. It was held by others to be navigable for the greater part of its course, and a Russian line of forts was declared to have been constructed along its banks, whilst a large work at Tchikishlar was reported to have been recently erected to guard the entrance of the river. And this, it was urged, was why Russia attached so much importance to her naval station near Astrabad.

Such were the geographical "*on dits*," and although the information was based on vague reports, and not on any personal observations, all the existing or supposed knowledge of these regions was embodied in a map which was secretly issued to our diplomatists in the East, and which but for our good fortune might have formed the basis for important political engagements with Russia.*

* This map, though faithfully representing all the knowledge available, we afterwards found to be utterly incorrect.

CHAPTER I.

Vienna—Rustchuk—Constantinople—Sinope—Trebizond—Batoum—Tiflis—Vladikavkas.

AFTER a thirteen years' command of the 10th Hussars, the period had arrived when a tie so long maintained, and which I can only compare to the love of a father for his children, must be snapped and broken; and I knew that some little time must remain at my disposal before fresh military employment would claim my services. I determined to devote this interval to useful purpose, to endeavour to penetrate the mystery which hung over those Eastern deserts, and to bring back, if possible, political, geographical, and strategical information that might be valuable.

Having once decided upon this journey, but little time was lost in preliminary preparations. I desired to be accompanied by an Engineer officer, whose special education would make all observations and surveys of additional value, and Lieutenant Gill, R.E., having heard of my intended project, eagerly volunteered his very useful services. Captain Clayton of the 9th Lancers, also, on the shortest notice joined our little expedition, and his genial energy and military abilities marked him out as a welcome addition to my party.

Inquiries made from the best Persian sources as to

the probable success of the expedition were not very hopeful. The highest authority on Central Asian affairs, while kindly giving the most important advice, added: "Under present circumstances, however, the service would be one of great difficulty and danger. The Turkomans would take you for a Russian, while you could expect no sympathy or support from the Russians themselves." Officers who had travelled in Persia, or had been attached to the telegraph service there, represented the obstacles to be overcome as almost insurmountable, and considered that the Russian authorities would strenuously oppose any attempt to visit Tchikishlar and the mouth of the Attrek. But H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, having heard of the proposed journey, graciously lent it all the aid in his power, and gave letters to the Grand Duke Michael at Tiflis, which proved invaluable in forwarding its success.

Prepared to face all difficulties and to surmount them by patient determination and perseverance, our little party made rapid preparations for departure. But the amount of baggage required for so prolonged a journey, and which should be equally ready for the needs of sport or the observations of science, became an item of serious magnitude. Breech-loaders entailed an immense supply of cartridges, and surveying instruments filled a large and ponderous box; so that, when on the evening of the 20th of April, 1873, our small party met at Charing Cross Station to start by the mail train to Vienna, the porters stared aghast as they had to register considerably more than a ton of luggage for only three passengers.

We reached Vienna on the 22nd, and put up at the 'Erzt Herzog Carl.' The Exhibition was to be opened within a few days, and all was bustle and confusion in

that pleasant capital. I had determined to travel to Constantinople by the Danube route, and as we were anxious to lose no time in reaching Tiflis, we did not loiter by the way, but started again on the morning of the 23rd by one of the river steamers to Pesth.

I know no pleasanter travelling than descending the Danube in the excellent vessels which ply in summer by this route. The rate of progression is almost equal to that of a slow railway train, and the scenery at times charming. By mid-day we were steaming rapidly past the old castle and picturesque fortifications of Haimburg, and to me the place brought back stirring recollections; for when last I passed the quaint old town, Benedek's army in full retreat from Königgrätz was bivouacking on this spot, and over a hundred guns were parked on the hill-side that now looked so quiet and peaceful. Then we stopped for a few minutes at Presburg, and I seemed to see the beaten and tired troops crossing that bridge of boats in never-ending column.

Soon the broad plains of Hungary stretched away to our left, the fields teeming with horses and cattle. Then the strong fortress of Comorn flitted by; and, as night fell, the bright lights on either side the river told that we were approaching the sister capitals of Pesth and Buda. Here we changed to a larger vessel, and the arrangements on board left nothing to be desired.

During our next day's journey the scenery was flat and uninteresting; but on the 25th we reached Basiasch, and in the afternoon were approaching Orsova on the frontier of Turkey. The view just before reaching Orsova is very beautiful, for the river narrows and rolls through a gorge in the mountain; far more impressive to my mind than the famous Iron Gates that lie below, and are passed in a small steamer of light draught,

which dashes through narrow and intricate channels amidst a turmoil of water rushing and foaming over the dangerous and hidden rocks.

We glided past Widin and Kalafat in the night. When morning broke, we were steaming down the broad waters of the noble river, and reached Rustchuk in the afternoon.

Although a river does not usually form a very defensible frontier, the Danube has many advantages. The Turkish bank is generally much higher than the Roumanian, and completely commands the approaches on the northern side. If there were telegraphic communication along the right bank, and a proper system of river iron-clad gun-boats were established, the passage of the Danube in the face of a hostile army would be a very serious undertaking.

It would be easy to build these river gun-boats with their sides sloping at such an angle that they could only be pierced by heavier guns than it would be possible to put into battery against them. With such boats, a judicious use of torpedoes, and a good system of communication, this river-line of frontier would be very strong. But all these points are little likely to be attended to by the Turkish Government.

We landed at Rustchuk, intending to take the railway to Varna, and then to go on to Constantinople by steamer. Rustchuk is a miserable place, and from its dirt should, and often does, form a hot-bed of fever, cholera, or any other epidemic that may be prevalent. The fortifications are in the most dilapidated condition, and it is easy in most places to walk over the works; but there is a large garrison, and I was much struck by the good material of the Turkish regiments. After being scrambled for by rival hotel touts upon our

arrival, we selected the hotel 'Islah Hanè,' which we were sorry for afterwards, as it was in the town and a long way from the railway station. Instead of being able to go on at once, we were to be detained here a night. The hotel was by no means of a prepossessing appearance; but the beds were clean, and we were off early in the morning. The country round Rustchuk consists of great plains, but on approaching Shumla it becomes more hilly, and is generally much covered with brushwood. At the station at Shumla we found an intelligent English child, looking very delicate. The poor little thing had suffered from fever at Varna, and had been sent to Shumla for her health. She was delighted to meet English people, but in spite of the fever did not seem to dislike Turkey. Her father was employed on the railway.

Before reaching Varna the country became very marshy, and the name of Devna brought back melancholy thoughts. What could have induced our army to encamp in such a notoriously unhealthy place it is difficult to conceive. Varna is a bustling town, but the bay is open, and the landing sometimes very difficult; and, if an easterly gale had set in whilst the great Crimean expedition was embarking here, what a disastrous business it would have been! Yet Bourgas Bay, perfectly land-locked, and with good camping-grounds, lay within two marches.

We found our steamer, the 'America,' waiting for us with steam up, and were told that we should be in the Bosphorus at daybreak; but, although we had a smooth passage, it was about 8 o'clock before we found ourselves steaming up the beautiful channel. How it recalled old Crimean days! But the place seemed to be changed, and not improved in appearance. So many European-

looking houses, stone or brick, have been built, that they have rather altered the general character, and they do not suit the landscape in their colouring so well as the old tumble-down wooden constructions.

About two miles from the Golden Horn was a Turkish fleet of nine vessels anchored; amongst them four very fine iron-clads looking remarkably smart and showing the handiwork of Hobart Pasha. On arriving at the well-known Pera landing-place, it became evident that we should have great trouble with our baggage. There were Russian, Austrian Lloyd's, French, and Turkish steamers, however, which went to Trebizond. So, quickly deciding upon the Austrian Lloyd's, we took the greater part of our baggage on board at once, although we had determined to stay a few days at Constantinople.

The place was crowded, and we could not get rooms at any of the hotels. We had stumbled across a very good dragoman named Angelo, who hired us some apartments in the Rue Venedek; but the smells were serious. We called at the Embassy and on Hobart Pasha. At the former place Mr. Hughes, the Oriental Secretary, very kindly showed us his splendid Oriental manuscripts, perhaps the finest private collection extant.

When the great fire took place at Pera, Mr. Hughes was in England; and, whilst travelling in a railway carriage, a fellow-passenger told him of the fire, and, not knowing him, lamented that the celebrated collection of manuscripts had been entirely destroyed. Great was his delight when, on returning to Constantinople, he found that the room in which they were stored had escaped although the Embassy was burnt down.

We spent some very pleasant days in Constantinople, thanks to the kindness of Sir H. Elliott, who also sent to the Russian Embassy and procured for us papers and

letters addressed to the authorities in the Caucasus, which he thought might be useful. We were made members of the Club; of course we did the bazaar at Stamboul, St. Sophia, &c., as C—— had not been in Constantinople before. To me it was all old familiar ground, except that Pera was much changed by its new half-European quarter. Finally, we paid a visit to Messrs. Hanson to conclude our monetary arrangements. As there was no chance of finding bankers further in advance, we obtained letters of credit upon their agents at Tiflis, Messrs. Pretyman and Co. Certainly Constantinople is much busier than it used to be in former years. Scutari has been considerably enlarged since Crimean days, and I could scarcely find the old house, looking over the Bosphorus, in which I had lived for some months after the war.

We endeavoured to induce Angelo to accompany us as interpreter, but he was so exorbitant in his demands that we could not agree.

We left Constantinople on the 2nd of May late in the afternoon, and found ourselves the only occupants of the first-class cabin on board the 'Galatea,' a very fine vessel with excellent accommodation. There were numberless deck-passengers of the most nondescript character—Armenians, Georgians, and many *hamals* returning to their homes, for most of the Constantinople *hamals* (porters) come from the southern shores of the Black Sea. It was rather distressing to learn that, although the 'Galatea' was a very fast vessel, her speed was limited by order of the company to eight knots. We had fine weather on the 3rd, and it was very pleasant coasting along the thickly wooded shores of Asia Minor; and on the 4th we reached Sinope, the scene of the loss of the Turkish fleet. Sinope might be made a little Gibraltar;

the harbour could easily be improved, and the place might be of the greatest importance; but who can think of improvement in Turkey?

I was much amused at the collection of the fares from the deck-passengers. It appears there is no fixed tariff to be paid beforehand; but anyone can go on board, and the ship's steward afterwards collects as much as he can get, threatening not to allow them to land if they do not produce something. The captain told us they sometimes had as many as 800 deck-passengers.

Sinope is a very striking place, with a high neck of land projecting right out to sea, somewhat like Portland, and the land side might be made very defensible. We did not stay long. On the morning of the 5th we were at Samsoon. The bay is pretty, and there is more trade here than at Sinope. A train of camels winding down the hills was the first reminder that we were approaching the East. After leaving Samsoon, snowy mountains are visible in the distance, and the scenery of the coast is charming. We expected to reach Trebizond at daylight on the 6th, but, when morning broke, we were in a dense fog and could see nothing, although the captain thought we were just off the bay. About breakfast-time, however, the fog lifted, and we soon steamed in.

Trebizond is very pretty from the sea, but, like most Turkish towns, it disappoints you on closer acquaintance. Angelo at Constantinople had described the bazaars in glowing colours, but they proved to be of a very inferior class. We went to the 'Hôtel des Voyageurs,' kept by a young Frenchman named Paul, a most civil fellow, who acted as our *cicerone*.

I had heard that Trebizond was a good head-quarters for sport, and that bears and red-deer could be found in large numbers. Paul could give me no information

except that there was good quail shooting; but he directed me to a sporting cobbler named Narim; and from him I heared the old story—that two days' journey inland good sport was to be had. Narim evidently knew the country, and his eyes glistened as he related sporting incidents.

We got a carriage, and drove eight or nine miles along the Erzeroom road. A good carriage-road of about 200 miles has actually been made of late years between Trebizond and Erzeroom, the Turks having at last recognised the strategical importance of that place, and the necessity of having communication with the coast. As long as the Black Sea Treaty was in force, Trebizond was not a bad line of communication; but, now that the Treaty has been torn to shreds, Russia will probably in a few years be superior to Turkey in that sea, and Trebizond itself is quite indefensible. The road was excellent, better indeed than our carriage, for, as we were rattling down a hill, a wheel suddenly flew off, and we came to grief and had to make our way back leisurely.

Paul gave a very poor account of the general state of the country. Murders were common, and the murderers, if in a position to give sufficient "backsheesh," could always escape. Anxious to uphold the credit of his hotel, our host gave us an excellent dinner of Black Sea turbot and some quails; and we arranged to go out quail shooting the next morning. We slept on board the 'Galatea,' as we were loth to give up our good quarters sooner than was necessary. We had to await the Russian steamer from Constantinople, which went as far as Batoum, while the 'Galatea' proceeded no further than Trebizond. The next morning we found Paul ready with two dogs, one an old toothless and tailless pointer. We saw a fair quantity of birds, but the

dogs were very useless. Paul proved himself to be a good shot, but on our return we were rather disgusted to meet a native sportsman with a bigger bag than our own.

The Russian steamer was due, but there were no signs of her on our return. On the morning of the 8th, however, she appeared. We had a false alarm that she would leave immediately, and, going on board, found the 'Buch' crowded, and the accommodation very inferior to that of the 'Galatea.' If the latter had been remarkable for her deck-passengers, they were tame compared with those on board the 'Buch.' There were a number of Lazes in their picturesque dress, and men of half the nations of the East. We did not start until 5 o'clock, and the evening was beautiful. The Lazes were most cheery fellows, dancing and singing nearly all night; but they are really a most villanous race of knaves and cut-throats, inhabiting the country between Batoum and Erzeroom.

The fare on board the 'Buch' was much better than we expected, and the caviare superior to any I ever tasted before or since. We often hear of the difficulty of getting good caviare in England. The fact is that it is impossible to get it here as good as in Russia, for to be really good it should be quite fresh; but by carefully preserving it from the air, as is done by Messrs. Fortnum and Mason in their glass barrels, it arrives in very fair condition.

In Russia it is always eaten with a little lemon-juice, and with bread-and-butter, not with hot toast, as in England. It is usually indulged in before dinner. This is a curious Russian custom that merits mention. In every dining-room is a side-table, on which are laid out caviare, dried salmon, anchovies, &c.,

together with bottles of *vodky* and other fiery spirits; and to this table the gentlemen, on entering the dining-room, repair. This is supposed to promote an appetite, and is called the *Zakuska*.

We were now introduced to Russian tea, and, if we only understood how to make it in England, we should never drink tea in any other form. Here we first buy very bad tea; then we make a strong decoction; and next, by mixing it with milk, destroy the tea flavour altogether. No wonder that high-priced teas go to Russia! To drink them with milk would be like mixing the finest Lafitte with water. The Russians buy fine teas, and make a weak decoction; or, rather, they usually produce two tea-pots, one filled with strong tea, the other with hot water; and thus each person can regulate the strength as he likes. They then add sugar and a slice of lemon; and no drink is more delicious or refreshing: but the tea should not be strong, and it should be of fine quality. The full flavour can then be appreciated. I am quite sure, if the plan were once tried in England with fine teas, it would entirely supersede our barbarous system of drinking bad tea diluted with milk.

It was a bright moonlight night, but, when we went on deck, we found that we were going at the rate of about three knots. The 'Buch,' it appeared, was a very old vessel, and this was her last voyage; her machinery was quite out of order. "But suppose we have a contrary wind?" I enquired. "Oh! let us hope not," said the captain.

At present all was favourable. The sea was like glass, and the high snowy mountains could be seen by the moonlight. The Lazes were still dancing, and singing the quaintest airs. The dance rather resembled

a Highland fling, and the great point seemed to be who could hold out the longest. What a picturesque medley the deck presented on that lovely evening!

It was close packing down below, and I remained until the Lazes stopped from sheer exhaustion. Gradually the motley crew stowed themselves away for the night, and silence reigned over the 'Buch.' We were very fortunate; no wind arose, and the slow old tub steamed into Batoum in the morning. I was very anxious to see Batoum, as its importance had been pointed out to me, and I had been told that the Turks had fortified it strongly.

It is, or might be, the best port on the eastern and southern shores of the Black Sea, and is much coveted by Russia. This is not to be wondered at, for she lost it in a curious way. When the Treaty was made, the river Tchorek was intended by Russia as her boundary. Now, there are two rivers—one the Tchorek, lying west of Batoum, and a little stream, the Tchoruk, lying some miles to the east. In the Treaty, Tchoruk was inserted in place of Tchorek, and the difference was not discovered until too late. For once the Turks outwitted the Russians. Thus Russia has no port on the Black Sea which is convenient as an outlet for Tiflis, while within a few miles of her frontier, suitable in every way, lies Batoum in Turkish hands.

The bay of Batoum is very striking. The town has been built in a swamp at the western entrance and is fearfully unhealthy; the higher ground on the eastern side is, I am told, perfectly healthy; but, of course, the Turks selected the worst site. The fortifications are miserable. One redoubt has been constructed, commanding the entrance to the harbour, and another at the head of the bay; but both are completely

commanded from the high ground in rear. A Turk never thinks of this. He makes a fort at the water's edge and is quite contented. Most certainly, unless something more is done, Russia could walk into Batoum whenever she chooses. Extensive and well-planned works are required, for there are successive ranges of hills in the background, each higher than and commanding the other. In good hands Batoum would be of great importance; but at present the roads leading to it are bad, and its trade is small. The water is so deep on the western shore that vessels afloat land their cargoes over their sterns, in the absence of a quay. It is a hot-bed of fever; but so is all the low ground on this coast.

At Batoum we changed to a little steamer of very light draught of water for Poti. Poti is the Russian port for Tiflis, and a railway runs between the two; but Poti has every disadvantage which a port can possess. It is, in fact, a perfectly open roadstead with a long, low, shelving shore. Native vessels of very light draught can lie in the river, but there is barely four feet of water on the bar.

Russia tried to make an artificial harbour, but it was destroyed by a storm long before it was completed. She is now trying another a few miles off, but I should think the costly experiment would end in a similar manner. Well may she cast longing eyes at Batoum only thirty miles off! Poti is a mere swamp covered with thick forest; so swampy is it that the wooden houses have to be raised some few feet off the ground. The climate is deadly, and a more fever-stricken hole it is difficult to conceive. Here Alexander the Great died —and no wonder!

Several large vessels were lying off in the roadstead.

We, however, were to enter the river; so, having carefully taken points, our little vessel made a dash at the channel, and, missing it, ran aground, but got off easily. I never saw such steering. Nine times we missed the channel, although the marks to steer upon were quite plain. At length, luck and perseverance took us through; and we steamed about a mile up the river to the Custom House. Here a great difficulty arose. We had wasted so much time in getting in, that the Custom House was just closing. The train for Tiflis started early the next morning before it opened, and the day after being Sunday there would be no train. There was thus a prospect of our being detained in this wretched place for three days. Hereupon I presented all my papers. The one from the Russian Embassy produced a good effect, and by dint of extreme politeness and persistence I at last got the Custom House officer to pass out about half of our things that we most required.

We now sought the 'Hôtel Colchide,' kept by M. Jacquot, a most civil Frenchman, who has actually managed to live at Poti for some years.

M. Jacquot undertook to look after our remaining baggage, and we determined to start the next morning, the train leaving at five. After giving strict injunctions as to being called, and receiving the most positive assurances, we went early to bed. I woke with a horrid idea that we were late, and found that they had forgotten to wake us. However, it was just possible yet to catch the train, and with much bustling we succeeded.

We had first to cross the river in a small steamer, and found a very decent little railway station, with a refreshment room and all the usual adjuncts. Here were Mingrelians and Georgians in their long dark coats, fur caps, and vests all ornamented with cases

to hold cartridges; every man carrying the large Damascene knife, and occasionally any number of other arms. It certainly seemed quaint to see them taking tickets at a railway station, and a good honest English engine blowing its steam off all the time. The carriages were open, as in America, and you could walk from one end of the train to the other while it was in motion. A lady and gentleman with a child were in the carriage we entered, and we soon found they were English. Mr. S. was the head of the carriage department on the line, and he gave us much information. It appeared that the railway had been very badly constructed, the gradients in one part being so severe that accidents constantly occurred.

The first stage of the journey was through densely wooded and marshy plains to Novo Seracky, about twenty-five miles. Here a few hills rise and the country is cultivated. The railway crosses many rapid streams, those same streams which so impeded the march of Omar Pasha and Sir L. Simmons in the attempted invasion of the Caucasus at the close of the Crimean War.

Near Kutais the country becomes hilly and the snowy range of the Caucasus is seen to the left. Mr. S. now offered to let us ride on the engine, from which we should get a much better idea of the construction of the line and of the general features of the country. Certainly the curves and gradients were wonderful! Some of the former were so sharp that in running through cuttings we lost sight of the fourth carriage. We kept constantly ascending, and the pace was very slow. Mr. S. said that further on an embankment had given way, and that we should have to drive for about eleven miles. At this point the gradient was one

in nineteen, or steeper, I believe, than on any other line not having three rails.

We found carriages waiting for us, and had a very pleasant drive up a steep pass and through a pretty country to Suram; which lies a little below the head of the pass, and is very prettily situated in a rich hilly country about 3000 feet above the sea. Here we again joined the railway, and, following the banks of the rapid river Koura, we reached Gori.

Soon after this it grew dark, and it was nearly ten o'clock when we arrived at Tiflis. The station is two miles from the town, and in the darkness we could form no first impression of the place. We drove to the 'Hôtel du Caucase,' where we secured very good rooms. The Hotel was kept by a Frenchman, M. Martin, who had retired from the Caucasus to France, after having made a little fortune. The whole of this he lost through the Franco-Prussian war, and he had now returned to recommence business.

The next day we devoted to rest and to gaining a general idea of the town. I must say that we were much disappointed. Travellers who come so far certainly draw upon their imagination for much of the magnificence they describe. There is little of the East about Tiflis save the people one meets; the buildings might belong to some second-class German town. There are, it is true, certain quarters where the distinction is more marked, such as the Persian, with its flat-roofed mud houses; but the general impression was by no means what I had expected. The Koura flows through the centre of the town. It looks like and is a salmon river. Tiflis lies rather in a valley, and is surrounded by a very open, undulating, and uncultivated country for many miles. To the north the snowy peaks of the

Caucasus are distinctly visible in clear weather, and hills of some 2000 feet in height look down upon the town from the south. Tiflis itself has a dusty look, and the general colouring is of the same hue.

The Grand Duke Michael was away at St. Petersburg, but was expected back in about ten days. We had now arrived at the starting point of our expedition, and it was absolutely necessary that we should see the Grand Duke before leaving Tiflis, in order to get authority to visit certain places under Russian rule.

It was difficult to form any settled plan of the general line to be followed; but I desired to visit, if possible, Tchikishlar, the mouth of the Attrek, and Astrabad; then to move up into the mountains of Gilan or Lenkoran and shoot during the heat of the summer, when it would be next to impossible to travel over the fiery plains of Persia; and next to return in the autumn and travel East, making our way, if possible, to Merv, exploring the Perso-Turkoman frontier, and tracing out the source and course of the Attrek.

For the first part of this programme it was necessary to have the permission of the Russian Government, and I had been told in England that there was very little probability of its being granted, more especially as the Expedition was now on its way to Khiva, and foreign officers had been expressly forbidden to accompany it.

Nevertheless, armed with the letters I possessed, I was very hopeful. On the next day, May 12th, we called on Prince Mirsky, who, under the Grand Duke Michael, commands the Russian army of the Caucasus. Nothing could exceed the kindness with

which we were received. The Prince, a man of only about fifty-five, had been much distinguished both against the Turks near Kars, and afterwards in the Crimea. He had been severely wounded at the Tchernaya, and had subsequently been very successful in the long mountain campaign against Schamyl in the Caucasus. His frank, soldier-like manner was very charming; and he at once requested his aide-de-camp, Captain de Krehmer, to take us in charge, and to show us everything in Tiflis that could be interesting in a military point of view. And I was astonished to find how much this comprised. The army of the Caucasus is organized as an independent force, and has its own Arsenal, Schools of Instruction, Topographical Department, &c., at its Head-Quarters, Tiflis.

On returning to our hotel, we made inquiries about an interpreter, as we were anxious to engage one who would accompany us throughout our trip. There were very great difficulties in the way, as it was little likely we should find a man who spoke Russian, Turkish, and Persian fluently; but an Italian was strongly recommended to us who spoke the first two languages, and had travelled much in the wilds of Asia Minor; and, as we liked his appearance, we engaged him. His name was Gerome Realini, and he most faithfully and honestly stuck to us to the end of our expedition, following our fortunes for many thousands of dreary miles.

The next day we called upon Baron Nicolai, the political head of the Caucasus under the Grand Duke. He spoke English perfectly, and was very kind; but was a little curious to know what could have induced three English officers to travel so far in the East for their own pleasure, and I think he suspected that we had covert designs of joining the Khivan Expedition.

On our return to the hotel we found Captain de Krehmer ready with a carriage to conduct us to some of the principal sights of Tiflis. We visited the General Hospital, which was well arranged and in good order; and the chief doctor was so enthusiastic about it, that he would make us go through all the typhus wards, which were well filled at the time. We afterwards visited the Topographical Department, which to me was intensely interesting. It was under the charge of Colonel Stebnitzky, a most intelligent officer, who had been at the head of the Survey Department with Colonel Markosoff's column when it marched from Krasnovodsk to Kizil Arvat and the Attrek.

Instead of the secresy I had been led to expect, the most recent surveys were shown to us. I was perfectly astonished at the work that had been done by this Department. We saw most beautiful maps of the Caucasus on a scale of 20 versts, 10 versts, and even 5 versts to the inch. A copy of Colonel Stebnitzky's surveys east of the Caspian, which had just been worked out, was through the kindness of Prince Mirsky presented to each of us, and proved most useful afterwards, as we were enabled to connect our own observations with his. We were also each given a copy of the most recent map of the Caucasus on the 20-verst scale. But what was extremely interesting to me was a new map of Persia, embracing a part of Afghanistan, and much more complete than anything in possession of our own Topographical Department.

We afterwards visited the School of Instruction under Colonel Rudiger. This school is instituted on the Prussian system. A battalion is formed of a certain number of intelligent men selected from every regiment in the Caucasus. Here they go through a regular

course to qualify them as Instructors; and, when so qualified, they return to their regiments. Thus the greatest uniformity is maintained, and a thorough knowledge of the most recent alterations either in drill or arms is acquired. The men were learning the use of the new Berdan rifle, an excellent weapon, which is being substituted for the Carlier. The Carlier is something like the Chassepôt, while the Berdan has a metallic cartridge like the Henry-Martini. The cartridge cases were of copper, the Russian Government not being afflicted by the penury which compels us to adopt a less effective substitute.

We dined with Captain de Krehmer in the Sans Souçi Gardens just out of the town, and after dinner went to the Club Gardens, where we had the first opportunity of seeing the ladies of the higher classes. We did not find the extraordinary beauty which is supposed to characterize the Georgians, but there were many pretty faces, though certainly not in as large a proportion as would be found in any English ball-room. The next day we visited the Military Schools. They were remarkably well organized, and proved with what a will Russia is taking up the idea of Military Instruction, and following the lead of Germany as regards her Staff and general system of Army education.

We afterwards proceeded to the Arsenal, where a supply of everything is kept in readiness for placing the army on a war-footing. The constructive power of the Arsenal, however, was not very striking. Amongst some old Turkish guns that had been captured, I found one that had evidently come from India, as it had been proved at Fort William. I could not learn its history.

In the evening we dined with Prince Mirsky, who is married to a Georgian Princess. We met Prince

Bariatinsky, who was engaged to a daughter of our host, and who had been in England. I had a long conversation with Prince Mirsky relative to the old bed of the Oxus, which, in olden days, instead of falling into the sea of Aral, ran into the Caspian near Krasnavodsk. Colonel Stebnitzky had surveyed this old bed for a considerable distance, and Prince Mirsky was of opinion that it would eventually prove useful either as a canal or as the line for a future railway.

On the following morning we went over the General Military Hospital and the Clothing Departments. There were about 800 sick in the former, and it was fairly arranged. The Clothing Departments, which were in very efficient order, furnish the supply for the whole Caucasian Army. The Russian infantry soldier wears high boots, considerably higher than Wellingtons. They have a clumsy appearance, but are very much liked by the men, and were made at this establishment at the cost of only 2½ roubles; yet the quality was excellent. But how the men can march in them over the burning plains of Central Asia, is difficult to conceive. In these stores full supplies of clothing are maintained for the reserves, in case of the army being placed on a war-footing.

In the afternoon we went to see the drill of a Tirailleur battalion commanded by Colonel Tolstoy. I never saw a more efficient or even body of men; but the drill was slow and of a bye-gone date. The companies were what we should call double companies, on the system general throughout the Continent. The men marched and doubled past remarkably well.

In the evening we dined with Colonel Tolstoy and Captain de Krehmer.

On the 16th May I called on Prince Mirsky and had

a long and most interesting conversation. He explained to me the whole plan of the Khivan Expedition, and strongly pointed out how difficult it would be for Russia to stay her advances until she had some well-defined frontier. We also had a long talk over the Crimean War. Nothing could be more charming than to compare notes with so thorough a soldier, whom one had served against, and who talked without the slightest bias and with nothing but the most chivalrous feeling. He gave me a most interesting account of the Battle of Kuruckdere, at which he had been present during the early part of the war, when the Turkish army in very superior force advanced from Kars. The Russians were completely outnumbered, and were on the point of being defeated when the Turkish superior officers deserted their men in a panic; and in the disorder which ensued the Russians recovered themselves and turned their defeat into a victory. Had the Turks succeeded, Prince Mirsky considered that the Russian hold on the Caucasus would have been most critical.

We heard the next day that the Grand Duke's arrival would be delayed, and that we must be content to pass a much longer time at Tiflis than we had intended. Our kind friends did everything in their power to make this stay pleasant, and Captain de Krehmer was ever organizing some fresh amusement. We used to pay long visits to the Bazaar, in the endeavour to purchase curious old specimens of arms or silver cups.

I know no place where these can be more readily found than at Tiflis, but the imitations are so clever that some knowledge is required in order to detect them. The old Georgian and Circassian silver cups are most quaint, and often of great antiquity; but the

imitations are much more common than the originals. In the evenings we used to go to a little theatre just on the outskirts of the town, where all Tiflis assembled, and where Russian plays and operettas were very fairly given. There was a very nice garden and restaurant attached to the theatre, and between the acts every one left the boxes and walked in the garden, which, as the weather was excessively warm, was very agreeable.

Prince Mirsky suggested that, as the Grand Duke could not arrive for some days, we should make an excursion through the Dariel pass to Vladikavkas north of the Caucasian mountains; and he gave a most interesting account of the Cossack settlements which he thought we should like to visit. On expressing our readiness to carry out his plan, everything was immediately arranged for us, and our kind *cicerone*, Captain de Krehmer, armed himself with papers directing that we were to be taken at express speed, and himself accompanied us, lending his carriage for the journey.

Vladikavkas lies at 180 versts' distance from Tiflis, so we started in the evening, in order to reach the mountains by daylight. We generally had six horses, but sometimes eight when the road was hilly. The pace was terrific, up hill and down dale the same; but so much time was lost at each station in changing horses that the average rate of travelling was not very fast. The post-horses are maintained by contract with the Government. How they can ever pay, I cannot understand; for I counted fifty-two horses in one large post-house.

The usual way of travelling long distances is either in a *tarantasse* or a *telega*. The former is like a little

hooded phaeton, without springs and without a seat inside. The latter is a long, narrow, light cart, quite open; and this is the more common form of posting. This vehicle only holds one person, with any convenience, besides the driver. Hay is put into the cart, and the traveller, having arranged his bedding and rugs, lies in a reclining attitude, or props himself up, according to fancy. These light carts are drawn by a *troika*, or three horses harnessed in a peculiar way; and the officers sent with despatches sometimes travel extraordinary distances in these conveyances. Colonel Tolstoy told me of one journey that he made, carrying despatches to the Emperor from Tiflis to Moscow without stopping, and described it as intensely fatiguing. We travelled in a large barouche and with every comfort, and reached the foot of the pass by about 8 o'clock in the morning. I found by the aneroid that we were already 3000 feet higher than Tiflis.

A beautiful military road has been made by the Russian Government between Tiflis and Vladikavkas. The ascent of the pass is a wonderful piece of engineering, for it is so gradual that it was very rarely that the horses had to walk. The view as we ascended the mountain was grand, and the head of the pass was a little more than 8000 feet above the sea. We stopped for some time at a station on the other side, from which a splendid view of the Kasbek mountain is to be obtained. Kasbek is 18,000 feet above the sea, and is very striking. They told us that, the year before, two Englishmen had determined to make the ascent, and, though the guides would not go beyond a certain point, the Englishmen went on alone and reached the top.

After leaving this station, we reached the Dariel pass.

The scenery is grandly terrible. The mountain seems to have been rent, and a roaring torrent dashes through the stupendous chasm, whilst old castles and ruins constantly appear upon impossible crags. One, hanging right over the torrent, is said to be the castle of Queen Tamaris, and tradition points out the arch through which her lovers were hurled down into the raging waters. Here and there, in commanding positions, stand Russian forts, or rather block-houses, which were built to defend the road in the Circassian war. On emerging from the pass, a lovely country lies below, so far superior to the southern side of the mountain that the change is most marked. I know nothing more charming than the beautiful park-like scenery at the northern foot of the Caucasus, with these grand mountains rising right up out of the plains to heights far exceeding the Alps, for Elburz is higher than Kasbek; and the combination of wood, water, mountain, and grassy glades, makes the neighbourhood of Vladikavkas very delightful.

We had no sooner reached the foot of the pass than we found a Cossack escort awaiting us. They dashed off at a gallop after the carriage, and then, dispersing on either side of the road, went through a variety of curious feats on horseback. One man would start at a gallop and fling his fur cap on the ground, while the next, throwing himself right out of the saddle, and only holding on by one leg, would pick up the cap, and immediately recover his seat. All sorts of feats were performed in spite of the ground being rough. The horses were wiry little beasts, and they rode them in snaffles. The men were very fine fellows, but too heavy for the horses.

Vladikavkas is a rising town, and the river Terek

runs through it, looking very like a salmon stream; but I could not quite make out if salmon are caught here. We put up at the so-called Club, but I fancy it is a private speculation. Our intention was to return the next evening, so we had no time to lose, having many official calls to make. We were up very early in the morning, as we wanted to inspect the Infantry Barracks and to visit the Stanitza, or Cossack military settlement, nearest to Vladikavkas.

These Stanitzas merit a detailed description.

It is the custom of the Russians to establish these Cossack military settlements right along their frontier, and that which we were now about to visit was formed during the old Circassian War. They are built upon a regular system, and surrounded by a wall with flanking towers. Each Cossack has a house and small plot of ground inside the walls, and as much ground as he can cultivate outside. They receive no pay, but have certain privileges; and every man maintains a horse and is bound to turn out, if required. Many of the men have served in their youth in a Cossack regiment. A number of the men belonging to the Stanitza we visited were away with the Khivan Expedition. The village was a regular military camp, and all were soldiers, the children in due time suceeding to the duties of their fathers.

In the long wars which raged between Russia and Circassia for so many years, these villages formed the frontier forts. Captured Circassian girls became the wives of the Cossacks, and a handsome and bold race grew up by degrees. Old Russian officers told me curious stories of those bye-gone days, and of the extraordinary ideas of morality which prevailed in these settlements. To these villages officers, when wounded or

sick, would retire to recover, and the most primitive system appeared to have been the rule.

The population of these villages has of late years increased and multiplied; and from the information we gathered I should imagine that the number of able-bodied men inhabiting all the Stanitzas in the Caucasus cannot be much less than 60,000. The total number of Cossacks and irregulars available on the whole Russian frontier must amount to close upon half a million of men. Russian officers, whose statements can be relied upon, have assured me that in case of a great war Russia could put a force of nearly 400,000 cavalry into the field; and they assert that the effect of such a force swarming both on the flanks and rear of a hostile army has not been considered in modern tactics and strategy. From it they conclude that great results would accrue, for they argue that it would be impossible to maintain the communications or to supply any army with food under such circumstances. This, however, is too large and too deep a military question to discuss here.

We left Vladikavkas in the afternoon. Our bill at the so-called Club was a curiosity. We had dined with some of the officers on the night of our arrival, so that it only included beds, breakfast, and an early dinner. The amount was 158 roubles.* Captain de Krehmer made them reduce it by 40 roubles.

It was dark when we reached the pass, and in the early morning we were descending the southern slope. This descent was certainly trying to the nerves, for we dashed round the most dangerous corners at a gallop, without any drag on, and once the wheel went right on to the stones that marked the border of the road with a precipice below. The Russian Government are con-

* A rouble is usually worth 2*s.* 8*d.*

structing a railway from the station at Rostov on the Don to Vladikavkas, and it is intended to continue the line to Tiflis. I presume that it will be carried over the pass on the Mont Cenis system, for tunnelling would be a long and laborious operation.

In the afternoon we stopped at a very curious and interesting place which Captain de Krehmer was anxious to show us. It is about twelve miles from Tiflis, and is evidently an old grave-yard; but of what date I believe no one has yet ventured to pronounce. Large stone sarcophagi are found enclosing skeletons, and in each sarcophagus is a small glass bottle, or tear-glass. Quaint ornaments of gold and coral have already been exhumed in very large numbers; and in the small museum at Tiflis a most interesting collection of these ornaments is to be seen. I recommend this grave-yard to the attention of antiquaries, for it has as yet been very little explored.

We reached Tiflis in the afternoon, and heard that the Grand Duke had not yet arrived. The next day, May 23rd, he came, and we were told that he would receive us the day following, when he was to hold a levée. We paid a visit to the Museum, where, in addition to the relics already mentioned, there is a very nice little collection of all the animals, birds, &c., to be found in the Caucasus, which to me as a sportsman was very interesting. I was astonished to learn that the bison is still sometimes found in the great woods of the Caucasian mountains. This is not the bison of India, but almost exactly like the bison (or so-called buffalo) of America, only very much larger. Such animals were, I believe, met with not many years ago in the forests of Poland. The specimen was that of a magnificent beast. In this museum they have a gigantic wild boar, quite double the size of the biggest I have ever come across in

my travels. In the afternoon we adjourned to the bazaar, and eventually purchased some beautiful old knives and silver cups at a very moderate price. We also went to see Prince Mirsky, who was laid up and very unwell. The Princess had an apartment fitted up exactly as a Persian room. It was very pretty, and I admired especially a Persian chintz of a remarkable pattern, which she told me came from Teheran. I made a note of this, with the intention of buying some at that place, but discovered on my arrival there that it came from Manchester.

On the following morning we proceeded to the levée, but the Grand Duke first received us privately. He was most kind, entered fully upon his projected improvements of the Caucasus, and lamented the absence of capital which prevented the development of this rich country. He especially pointed out, on a beautiful raised map of the Caucasus which was in his room, a large tract of country which we should pass on the road to Baku, comprising many hundreds of square miles, and only requiring irrigation to make it one of the richest districts in the world. Yet it was now lying untilled for want of irrigation, although a large river ran right through it. It was the same, he said, with the vast mineral wealth of the country. It was completely undeveloped, and so little known that it was difficult to attract to it the regard of European capitalists.

I asked the Grand Duke for permission to visit Tchikishlar and the Attrek. He laughed at the attention which had been drawn to the former place by the press in England. "All our troops," he said, "have now been withdrawn from it, and you will find it a place of no importance; but there happen to be springs of good water there, and so we have sometimes used it as a camping-ground when organizing expeditions."

He gave me the required permission, saying that every facility should be granted to us; and we left, delighted with his frankness, and fully impressed with the conviction that it will be difficult to replace him in the important post he now holds as Governor-General of the Caucasus. The next day we received an invitation to dine at the palace, when we were as much charmed with the kind-hearted and genial Grand Duchess as with her illustrious husband. Their children were all dressed in the costume of Russian peasants, which was very becoming.

Everyone dines early at Tiflis and takes a drive afterwards, or goes to the theatre; but at dinner we had met a General Shehavskoy, attached to the suite of the Grand Duke, and who had been pointed out to me as a mighty hunter. He invited us to go to his house and see his spoils of the chase. He gave me much information relative to shooting in the Caucasus, and described many of his own adventures, advising us to return in the autumn, when he promised excellent sport. Not contented with imparting this information, the General produced some Hungarian wine, which he said had been in his possession for many years. Such wine it was as I had never believed that Hungary could produce; and it proves that, if we are inclined to look down upon Hungarian wines, it is because we do not know the good brands.

The Grand Duke had invited us to attend a review of the whole garrison of Tiflis the next day. There were nine battalions on the ground, but no artillery, and only a squadron of Cossacks. As we moved down the line, each battalion cheered as the Grand Duke passed, remaining at attention the whole time; and this had rather a striking effect. They afterwards marched past. On the whole they were a very fine body of men, giving

the impression of great powers of endurance, but rather slow in all their movements. After the infantry had marched past, the Grand Duke put them through a few simple evolutions, and then the Cossacks performed the feats that we had already seen at Vladikavkas; but, although the ground was very favourable, they were not so successful. One man indeed was nearly killed, and was carried away insensible.

We now took leave of the Grand Duke Michael, as we intended to start next day to Baku, 400 miles by road. Captain de Krehmer most kindly lent us his carriage, and we succeeded in hiring a sort of fourgon for the luggage. Fast courier's orders for post-horses were given to us, and an order for escorts wherever necessary. We were requested to avail ourselves fully of these, especially in particular places near Elizabetpol, which were reported to be by no means safe. The next day was spent in paying farewell visits, and bidding good-bye to Prince Mirsky, who had provided all the necessary papers to carry us safely on our way. We shall none of us ever forget all the kindness that we received from him and his amiable family.

I had arranged to leave in the evening, and Colonel Tolstoy and Captain de Krehmer, who had never forgotten us for one moment during our stay, and to whom we were indebted for innumerable attentions, were to dine with us and to see us off. Mr. Pretyman, who, with two other young Englishmen, had established a commercial firm at Tiflis, and who had given us every assistance in his power, also came to speed us on our way. But there were so many delays in packing the baggage that midnight had passed ere all was ready, and then we bade good-bye to our friends and rolled away through the deserted streets of Tiflis.

CHAPTER II.

Elizabetpol—Schemakha—Baku—Enzelli—Perivale—Astrabad—Ashourada.

We had not gone five miles before something went wrong with the fourgon; but every conveyance in the Caucasus travels with a good supply of ropes, and the damage was soon repaired. However, it seemed so dangerous to allow all our valuable baggage to proceed with only the driver for escort, that we told off Gerome to ride in the fourgon; much to his disgust, for it was certainly not a pleasant conveyance to travel in over the rough roads that we had to encounter. Gerome had discarded the ordinary dress which he had worn at Tiflis, and now appeared in full Georgian costume, with a fur cap and armed to the teeth, and altogether with so formidable and ferocious an aspect that we scarcely knew him again.

When morning broke, we found that the road was following the course of the river, and we were passing through a very open country, uncultivated plains, lying in a broad valley some twenty miles in width. There was a quantity of low bush, extending for something like a quarter of a mile on either side of the river, and I recognised this as the place which General Shehavskoy had described to me as their favourite cover for shooting

wild boar. He had told me that the low bush was full of them. How an Indian pig-sticker's mouth would have watered! And what sacrilege it seemed to shoot them in such ground! There never was such a country for boar-spearing. But pig-sticking is unknown except to Englishmen; and many a time afterwards I came upon ground swarming with pigs, that would have made the Indian hog-hunter burn with envy.

All that day we travelled on, occasionally having to wait for the fourgon. We had an escort from stage to stage, but never waited for it, and it did not always join us at the posting-house. The men had evidently been warned all along the road, for sometimes a solitary horseman would be seen on a distant hill, and, as we came up, three or four more would join him; then the old escort would halt, and the new moved on with us. Night and day the same thing occurred; we never halted for them.

As darkness came on this first day, we were told that we were in a dangerous neighbourhood, and they wished us to take twelve men; but I considered six quite sufficient, and sent four of them with the fourgon. It would have been hard indeed, if we three Englishmen, all armed with revolvers, and with guns and rifles quite handy and ready, could not have held our own against any such desultory attack as we were likely to meet with. But no incident enlivened the monotony of the road; and at daybreak the next morning we perceived a large clump of trees in the distance. As we drew nearer, a few buildings could be discerned amongst them; and eventually, in the very early morning we reached the post-house. We were evidently expected, although the Commandant of the town was away, for the Superintendent of Police, as the next official, soon made his

appearance and was most anxious to show us all that he could of Elizabetpol. I had determined not to remain here more than six or seven hours, as we wished to push on to the land of most interest.

Elizabetpol is a place of some importance, being the chief town of that vast tract of country which lies between Tiflis and the Caspian. Situated as it is amongst a lawless and restless people, it is a seat of government of more importance than interest. Of course the Superintendent took us over the gaol, and pointed out the numerous murderers and assassins who had recently been captured after very great difficulty by the police under his charge. One was supposed to have committed over fifty murders, and another nearly as many. The latter was a splendid specimen of an old man, with the most extraordinary head I ever saw. He resembled an eagle; a magnificent face, but with every feature of a bird of prey. He looked at us as a hawk might at a mouse, and they would not let us go in to speak to him, so dangerous was he considered.

We were hurried round all the sights of Elizabetpol, among which a small printing-press appeared to be the most considered; and then we were taken to see a rather curious old Mosque. The head Mahomedan priest was in attendance, the chief priest of the district, as I was informed. To my surprise, the Superintendent was about to walk straight in with his boots on, and without slippers. I begged him not to do so, and said that we should be quite contented to look in without violating religious prejudices by entering with booted feet. The priest gave me a grateful look, with a sigh of relief, as his sanctuary escaped pollution by the infidel. This little incident gave a field for much thought as to the English and Russian modes of treating their conquered

dependencies in the Eastern world. Nothing can be more distinctive than the two. We show the utmost delicacy for the religious feelings of the races we subject, and even punish any violation of their prejudices. The Russians, on the contrary, though professing religious toleration, really act as proselytizing conquerors. Which course will be the most successful in the long run, time alone can prove.

Soon after leaving Elizabetpol we came upon those rich plains which had been alluded to by the Grand Duke. They extend all along the lower course of the Koura, and nothing can exceed the fertility of the soil. Where it is cultivated, the crops grow with extraordinary luxuriance, and yield, I was told, twice in the year. The great river runs right through these plains with a tolerably rapid current, so that nothing would be easier than irrigation. What a corn-growing country may here some day be developed! At present, however, the difficulty of land carriage towards the west checks its cultivation, although the produce might easily be sent in boats down to the Caspian, and from there transported to any part of Russia. But this requires capital, and capital is not forthcoming, though doubtless some day this now deserted ground will afford occupation for a thriving population. After going about twenty miles we reached the banks of the Koura, which we had to cross in a ferry-boat. Close to the ferry stood the large buttresses of a bridge. These were completed, but no one knew when the bridge itself would be finished, nor could I learn whether it was intended for a railway bridge or as an ordinary one to facilitate communication. At present there is no bridge over the river between Tiflis and the Caspian.

After crossing the Koura we passed through a rich

and highly cultivated country, which extended for about five miles, and then we again ran into a desert, but with watercourses constantly crossing the road. The way in which our driver dashed through these watercourses was very trying to the springs; in fact, how any carriage can stand a journey between Tiflis and Baku is indeed a puzzle. Soon after dusk a watercourse appeared ahead, which our driver dashed at as usual. It turned out to be deep and boggy, and in another instant two horses were down and the carriage sunk to the axles in the mud. Then the driver, who had got us into the mess by pure recklessness, was perfectly helpless, and had no idea of getting us out of it. The carriage could not go forwards, but the idea of going backwards, and then selecting a sounder passage never struck him; so we at last reversed the horses, and, fortunately nothing but a trace being broken, were soon on our way again. The night was very dark, and at the next station there was a broad but shallow river to cross. How the carriage managed to get over, I do not know; but, after plunging into innumerable holes, we at last reached the other side. At this station we could get no post-horses before the morning; so we lay down in the post-house and slept well.

I was up first, and we were away at a quarter to five on the 30th May, hoping to reach Schemakha early in the afternoon. We now got on to higher ground, and passed through a fine cultivated and well-watered country. To our left were several Tartar villages of tents. One village was just breaking up and migrating to some other spot, and the tents were being packed away on the camels. At the second station, to our dismay, we found that there were only post-horses for

the carriage, and none for the fourgon. We had met several officers evidently travelling post with despatches for Tiflis; and hence the scarcity of horses. Gerome therefore was left with the fourgon, with instructions to follow as quickly as possible. During this next stage we passed endless streams pouring down from the mountains to our left, yet the rich country below was uncultivated. It was most tedious work, getting the carriage through these water-courses, some of which were evidently broad rivers a quarter of a mile wide in the winter. At the next station we came upon a considerable town, named New Schemakha; where, instead of the bare and treeless country that we had been passing through, we found the most wonderful verdure. Mulberry, fig, and other trees grew in profusion.

We here commenced the ascent of the pass which leads over the mountains to Schemakha. When the projected railway to Baku is constructed, it is intended that, instead of taking this road, it shall follow the river until it approaches the Caspian, and then, bending towards the north, avoid the mountains altogether; but this will of course be a much longer route. The pass was very steep, and G——, taking his gun, walked on ahead. Soon afterwards we saw him taking steady aim at something, and when he fired a fine fox bounded away unhurt whilst we gave him a good Tally-ho, which had never before, I fancy, been heard amongst those hills. G—— next came across a number of francolin, but did not succeed in getting any. Soon after reaching the top of the pass there was a great improvement in the road, and a little further on we came upon a working party of some hundreds of Tartars. We had the maddest driver for this stage that we met

with throughout; fortunately this part of the road was excellent, for he brought us in the last five miles at full gallop.

Schemakha is a considerable town, but earthquakes are most common; and, a recent one having destroyed half the houses, it looked in a most shattered condition. The post-house was far superior to those we had passed, and here we met a most gentlemanly Russian who was travelling to Tiflis. He was, we afterwards discovered, a Monsieur Lenovitch, to whom we had a letter of introduction. He told us of the failure of Markosoff's column in its attempt to reach Khiva, and that it had fallen back upon Krasnavodsk in a most shattered state, and gave a melancholy picture of the sufferings of the men. No newspaper correspondents accompany the columns, and I fancy we little know the loss with which some of these desert expeditions are accomplished. He told us that 120 horses had died of sunstroke in one day. I had no idea that horses suffered in this way, but on my return to England Sir H. Green informed me that in traversing the country near the Bolan Pass in India he had lost horses from the same cause. This disaster accounted for the number of couriers on their way to Tiflis. We waited anxiously all the evening for the arrival of Gerome with the fourgon, but night came and no luggage appeared. The next morning I was up at daybreak; yet no sign of Gerome. At length, at half-past seven, he drove in, having had great delays in getting horses. In another hour we were off again.

On all sides the terrible effects of the earthquakes were evident. A little further on we passed a very solid bridge which had been completely shattered. As we progressed, the country became more and more deserted,

until at length we entered a regular salt desert. Nothing can be imagined more dreary and depressing than this great tract which intervenes between Schemakha and Baku. I have marched across the Desert between Suez and Cairo; but that gives no idea of the terrible salt deserts of Asia. Just before dark we reached some considerable lakes, which, I am told, swarm with duck in the winter. About an hour after dark we saw lights in the distance, and heard the sound of the sea; and soon we were dashing through the streets of Baku, where we were by no means sorry to draw up before the door of the 'Hôtel Dominique.'

Instead of the usual trouble on arriving at an hotel in an out-of-the-way town, we found we were expected. The best rooms were ready. M. Dominique, the most civil of Italian landlords, presented himself; and after a "grateful tub" we sat down to a very fairly comfortable dinner. Within an hour, an officer arrived from the Governor to say that he would be most happy to receive us in the morning. When the baggage was unpacked, the effects of the journey were painfully and extraordinarily evident. I could not have believed that such results could have been produced by 400 miles of travelling. Strong leathern cartridge cases, new on leaving England, were worn right through, and the cartridges falling out; a solid iron box had all the corners smashed in, and as it contained preserved meats, sauces, &c., we dreaded to think of its contents.

On June 1st, an aide-de-camp appeared at breakfast-time to fix the hour for our visit, and to request us to dine with the Governor in the afternoon. We learned that our steamer would leave late that night, and that we were to have as fellow-passengers

the wives of the Shah of Persia, who accompanied him on his visit to Europe as far as Moscow, and had then been sent back. Nothing could exceed the civility of the Governor, M. Strositski, a very young general officer. Madame Strositski and her sister were also present, and had done all that was possible to make their home pretty and comfortable. Near the house were some small gardens tended with fond and anxious care, for anything green is cherished at Baku much as that one solitary little tree is guarded and watched at Aden. The General, as usual, had made every arrangement for our convenience and amusement. Places on the steamer had been secured for us, and he proposed that we should proceed after dinner in men-of-war's boats to visit the curious naphtha springs which rise in the sea about five miles from Baku.

We dined early, and found a very agreeable party assembled. Madame Strositski and a very pretty Georgian princess had been invited to visit the wives of the Shah on board the steamer. There was some little question whether it was quite correct for them to go; but curiosity decided in the affirmative, and it was agreed that we were all to meet afterwards, when they would render an account of their visit.

After dinner we got into two large men-of-war's boats, and were pulled across the bay to the springs. Instead of seeing springs of naphtha rising in the sea, as I had expected, and read in an account of the Caspian, we found naphtha gas in extraordinary quantities bubbling up from below. A lucifer match was lighted and thrown into it, when the surface of the water to a considerable extent burst into flames, which enveloped the other boat in which were the Governor's children,

but did not seriously burn it. The night being dark and the sea smooth, we were enabled to see the springs to the best advantage.

The Governor gave us some most interesting accounts of the development of the apparently inexhaustible supply of naphtha which is found in the neighbourhood of Baku. It promises to have a great effect in facilitating steam communication on the Caspian and the rivers running into it, as it is now burnt instead of coal. When proper steam machinery on a large scale is in working order for pumping the naphtha from the wells, it will be produced, he thought, at an almost nominal cost. It had previously been a monopoly, and it was in the interest of the holders to keep up the price; but the Government had now become alive to its value, and were encouraging the extension of the workings by every means in their power. Curiously enough naphtha springs are also found on the island of Chiliken on the opposite side of the Caspian, which looks as if they extended right under the bed of that sea.

On our return we found the ladies had been much interested with their visit. They gave a full and glowing account of their reception, but were disappointed with the beauty of the favourite of the Shah. They described her as rather coarsely handsome, with a painted face (which, by-the-by, she may have learned during her short visit to Europe), and with bracelets on her wrists and ancles. Her jewelled jacket had excited great admiration. The ladies had gained the greatest insight into the inner life of the *anderoon*,* and the favourite dances of the Shah had been rehearsed before them. The costume in vogue certainly would

* Persian equivalent for harem.

not have been passed as correct by the Lord Chamberlain. Later in the evening the gardens near the Governor's house were crowded by the inhabitants of Baku. A military band was in attendance, and dancing was kept up with great spirit. We wished our kind entertainers good-bye, and about midnight were on board the steamer, where we had to put up in the saloon, as the Shah's wives had appropriated all the accommodation below. When daylight broke we were steaming down the Caspian.

There was on board a considerable suite of Persians in attendance upon the wives, and apparently with very sporting tendencies, for when a little later an immense flock of pelicans passed over the vessel, rifles were produced and a good deal of desultory popping went on. One of them had a very nice old two-groove rifle by Purdey, and another a double-barrelled No. 12 by Reilly, but both muzzle-loaders. I had a Westley Richards Express rifle, and this excited great admiration. The pelicans were making for a small rocky island that we could see in the distance, and came over in strings many miles in length. They were in immense numbers, and flew rather like swans. By midday we were off Lenkoran. It was to this neighbourhood that I thought of coming back for the hot weather, but the accounts we received of the sport were not very tempting. We did not stay here long, and just before dusk were off Astara.

The small Astara river marks the Persian and Russian frontier. The scenery here is very beautiful, and the mountains rise to a height of from six to seven thousand feet, and are thickly clothed with wood to the water's edge. It was quite a relief after the desolate treeless scenery in the neighbourhood of Baku.

On the morning of the 3rd June we were off Enzelli, which is the harbour of Reshdt, the port for Teheran, which lies about 200 miles distant. Here the Shah's wives were to land, and after a considerable amount of fuss a small steamer came off to fetch them. They left the cabin below in a very dirty state; but the party going on to Ashourada was much reduced, and there was now plenty of room. Our steamer was of about 500 tons burden, but with light draught of water, as required for the shelving shores of the Caspian; and the accommodation was fair. I had heard much of the beauty of Enzelli, but a thick haze shrouded the shore, and we could see but little. As we thought that we must return to Enzelli to get to Teheran, we left the mass of our heavy baggage here in charge of the agent of the steamer. We were off again by midday, but the haze was most unsatisfactory. We could see only the low shores, though we knew that there was a background of great mountains which would have been visible in clear weather.

The next morning, June 4th, we stopped for a short time at the little trading station of Mashad-i-Sir, and late in the afternoon some small low islands, just rising out of the sea, were pointed out to us as Ashourada. Steering past these islands, we entered through a channel, and then running due west we anchored off the station. Between the island and the mainshore lies a long land-locked bay. The island of Ashourada alone is in the hands of the Russians, and they have no footing at present on the mainland. We immediately landed and sent our letters to the Port Captain. A little fleet of small men-of-war, sailing-vessels, and steamers was lying in the harbour, for this is the chief naval station of the Caspian. In a short time a naval officer

arrived and took us to the house of one of the captains belonging to the station, who very kindly put his house at our disposal. We then called on the Port Captain and explained our wish to visit the Attrek and Tchikishlar, according to the instructions of the Grand Duke. But it was quite evident that this visit was decidedly unpopular at Ashourada. All the steamers suddenly had their boilers out of order; the sailing-vessels had sick crews; there was nothing available but a little schooner of about 100 tons. Besides, it was represented that to attempt to go in a sailing-vessel was madness. We might be driven off the coast, and be away for a month; or we might be driven on the coast, which was worse. The shores were shelving and dangerous, and to be caught in a westerly gale on a lee-shore was certain death; and, then, even the captain of the schooner was ill, and he would not be off the sick-list for some days.

To all these representations I opposed a civil but passive resistance. If there was nothing available but the schooner, no doubt the schooner would do very well. If we were away a month, it would be unpleasant; but we must hope for better luck. If the captain was sick, we would take a short trip to Astrabad, and probably he would be all right on our return. If not, we would wait until he recovered. This dogged determination had its effect, and it was arranged that the schooner should be ready for us on our return from Astrabad. An officer was told off to accompany us to Astrabad with two sailors as an escort, and a message was sent to Perivale (Gez) on the mainland to prepare ponies for our journey. We were invited to pass the evening at the house of the Port Captain, and all the officers of the little station were summoned to meet us. C—— and a Colonel of Engineers fraternized considerably, although,

as the latter only spoke Russian, communication was difficult; but they drank *vodky* and other deleterious mixtures that produced severe headaches the next morning. On getting up we found that the wind had risen considerably, and were told that the sea was too much for the steam launch which was to have taken us across, about seven miles, to the mainland. However, the little schooner was ready; we found her a very nice vessel, and, as the wind was fair, we got over much quicker than the launch could have gone.

Perivale is a miserable little trading station, but it is to this port that all the trade of the south-east of the Caspian makes its way; and the Russian steamers that ply between Astrabad and Ashourada, having discharged their passengers at the latter place, come over here to load with whatever they can pick up. There is a rickety wooden landing-stage which acts as a pier, and a small village surrounded by jungle. Here we found Mirza Suleiman, a Persian, acting as the Russian Agent, ready to receive us. M. Marquis, which we heard was the name of the officer appointed to be our *cicerone*, was a charming little man; but, after always addressing him by that name for some days, we found out that it was only a *soubriquet*.

Mirza Suleiman was a most intelligent Persian, and had the quiet easy manner which so often characterizes that nation. He took us to his house while the ponies were being assembled, and we were told to be very careful, as the road to Astrabad was infested by robbers, three Persians having been carried off only the day before. We made a formidable party of seven, all well-armed, and Mirza Suleiman and a guide came with us, as it had been arranged that we should only go to a village about fourteen miles on the road that after-

noon, proceeding to Astrabad in the morning. Our sailors did not seem quite comfortable on their steeds, and M. Marquis looked forward with dread to the probable results of a forty-five mile ride. The road led through dense jungle, and we had only gone a few miles when there were loud cries in front, and wild-looking creatures, armed with matchlocks, bolted up into some high platforms which had been erected in the trees, where they began blowing away at their matches in great excitement. They turned out to be Persians set to guard the road against Turkomans. I fancy that a very few Turkomans would have proved a match for them. Indeed, they seemed considerably relieved when they found no hostile demonstration was intended by us.

In good time we reached our village, which, surrounded as it was by forests, reminded me of the jungle villages of Ceylon. A large yard was assigned to us, and we were to sleep in a sort of open shed; which, as the weather was warm, was by no means unpleasant. After dark the villagers assembled in force, and brought some dancers and singers, who afforded more amusement to them than to us. The dances were grotesque and gross, and the singing very much the same that one hears all over the East. The shed had been neatly arranged with carpets and cushions, and we slept comfortably enough. We got away early the next morning, so as to avoid the heat of the day, and pushed on quickly for Astrabad. The road, like all roads in Persia, was a mere track through the jungle, and the haze which had so constantly hung over the mountains still obscured the view. Occasionally we came upon small villages and patches of cultivation. Cotton appeared to be the great staple of agriculture, and we had seen bales at Perivale waiting for the steamer. At

last the country became more open; we could see the walls of Astrabad about four miles distant, and soon reached one of the gates.

Like most frontier towns of Persia, Astrabad is surrounded by a thick mud wall of about thirty-five feet in height, with flanking towers, and a deep irregular ditch, which does not extend right round the walls. The town contains about 15,000 inhabitants, and all the houses are within the walls. The houses themselves are very poor, composed principally of mud, the better class being of unburnt bricks. Houses of burnt bricks are very rare in Persia, and a modern construction of a really substantial character is almost unknown. We were taken by M. Marquis to the house of M. Bakouline, the Russian Consul, who very kindly had rooms prepared for us. Mdme. Bakouline and her husband, with his suite, were the only Europeans living at Astrabad. Madame had suffered much in health, and sadly felt the lonely life. The only event they had to look forward to was the occasional visit of an officer from Ashourada; but, Russian officers having neither the restless activity nor the sporting propensities of the English, their visits were few and far between.

At the back of the house was a very considerable garden, in which the bitter-orange trees grew to a great size. They looked very pretty and luxuriant, covered with their yellow fruit. These bitter-orange trees are very common in all the low countries in the districts of Mazanderan and Gilan, and also in some gardens on the higher plains of Persia. They give a most grateful shade, but the fruit is of course uneatable.

M. Bakouline, a very intelligent and well-informed man, having heard of our anxiety for sport, sent for a native hunter, or *shikarree*, for he was no sportsman himself, and

knew little about it. Abbas, the hunter, who soon appeared, was evidently a character. He had a gun with him quite as long as a duck-gun; and M. Bakouline told me that he had the reputation of being an excellent shot. Abbas declared that there was sport of all kinds to be had, but that this was the wrong season of the year. In September he said that we could get tiger, red-deer, antelope, and wild boar in any number; also that there were large quantities of pheasants in the brushwood only a mile or two from the town; so we agreed to go out early the next morning.

In the afternoon the English *mirza*, or news-letter writer, called, and placed his house and all he had at my disposal. These news-letter writers are Persians, and in correspondence with the Legation at Teheran. At large towns, or places of importance where there may be difficulty in maintaining a consul, these native letter-writers are appointed, who acquaint the Minister with any political events of importance in their respective districts. Russia keeps up the same system, and the news-writers of the two nations watch each other jealously, even in the very remote and little-known regions of Central Asia. I think our *mirza* was rather scandalized that we should be staying with the Russian Consul, and I found, on arriving at Teheran, that the event had been immediately transmitted to the Legation.

We went out with Abbas the next morning, but were utterly disgusted. We shot a few hares, but only saw one pheasant. These birds are very like the English pheasant, but with a little white in the wing; and the white ring round the neck is very rare.

We found a camp of 3000 men established outside the walls, and on making inquiries of M. Bakouline learned that they were going down to the Gourgan

to collect the taxes from the Turkomans established on Persian soil. Here seemed an excellent opportunity of seeing this part of the country, and I immediately proposed that, when the camp moved, we should accompany it. M. Bakouline did not welcome this suggestion, but offered to ride to Gourgan with us when the camp was established. And here I made a little discovery showing how utterly ignorant we are in England of the real state of affairs on these out-of-the-way and distant frontiers.

It is generally supposed that the lower course of the river Attrek forms the boundary between Persia and Russia in the neighbourhood of the Caspian. If a question were to be asked in the House of Commons, this would be stated as a fact. As I was very anxious to see any and every part of the Attrek, I suggested to M. Bakouline that when we went to Gourgan I could take a Persian escort and ride on to the Attrek, as the rivers ran parallel with each other, and the distance between them is only about twenty miles. To this M. Bakouline objected; and, on my pressing him for his reasons, it turned out that the Russians have really assumed the Gourgan as the boundary, and that no Persian armed force could cross that river. Thus Russia has quietly appropriated both banks of the Attrek and one bank of the Gourgan. The ulterior importance of this advance will be discovered hereafter, in dealing with this question more fully.

Gourgan is the name of a place on the Gourgan river, where there is a bridge; and here I may mention a peculiarity about Persian rivers which is most perplexing to travellers and explorers. Instead of a river having one name throughout, it is called differently in different parts, according to the locality it runs through. It is

as if the Thames were called the Maidenhead river at Maidenhead; the Richmond river at Richmond; the London river in its proximity to that city, and so on. It will be immediately evident how puzzling this is to the explorer.

You are travelling, aided by some crude map which you have proved over and over again to be utterly incorrect; at last you come to a point where, say, the Attrek ought to lie, and you see a river not very far distant. This must be the Attrek, you naturally think. You ask a native, and are told it is the Monah river. Yet it is the Attrek after all; and, if you had struck it at a different point, it would have received a different name. There is no country in the world where it is so difficult to obtain geographical knowledge except by actual observation as in Persia. The Persians generally, even in the highest classes, have no knowledge whatever of maps. They neither understand them nor care for them. Often, when travelling and conversing with the natives, I have, by the aid of map and compass, pointed in the direction of places which they thought were only known to themselves, and they have looked upon it as something akin to necromancy.

I had arranged with M. Bakouline to pay a visit to the Governor the next day, and he was to accompany us. It was quite evident by this time that our projected visit to Gourgan was contrary to the wish of our host; and an incident now occurred showing the great influence of a Russian Consul over Persian officials.

We found the Governor prepared to receive us. His house, or palace, if it may be so called, was like most Persian houses of this class. First, you generally pass through an out-building, which is occupied by the domestics or attendants. From this you emerge into

a garden with long narrow tanks of water and not very luxuriant vegetation, though a few orange-trees give a little shade; then you reach the house itself. The centre part has a deep verandah on either side, with one or two large reception rooms between; and the wings form the private rooms, one being devoted to the *anderoon*, or women's apartments. The verandah at the back of the house is the most private, and generally overlooks the best garden, and here the chief usually receives his visitors. There is seldom any furniture in a Persian house. A few carpets and occasionally some cushions are all that will be found; but, as these carpets have much to do with etiquette in the East, they merit full description.

The floor is generally covered with a brown felt, three times as thick as a drugget and somewhat of the same texture. Then, over perhaps half the room, a carpet is spread upon the felt; and at the head of the room, where the chief reclines, there is another small and fine-textured carpet, upon which he sits. Sometimes there are even more than this number of gradations. According to the rank and position of the person received, is the carpet he should occupy. Thus, an ordinary individual coming in to make a report to the chief or khan would sit upon the felt; people of importance would sit upon the first carpet; while one of the relative rank or position of the khan himself would sit upon the carpet occupied by the chief. The Persians are a very polite race, but they expect strangers to maintain their own dignity; and nothing pleases them more than to be able to humiliate a foreigner in the eyes of their own people, if he will submit, intentionally or unintentionally, to the humiliation. By the place taken by a stranger will his rank and importance be viewed; and an attempt

is usually made to induce the foreigner to occupy a carpet lower than his position warrants. If weak enough to do so, he is ever afterwards looked down upon in consequence. There is no country in the world where etiquette is so jealously maintained as in Persia, and the traveller would do well thoroughly to acquaint himself with Persian customs and habits before travelling amongst them.

We found Suleiman Khan, unlike most Persians, sitting in a chair; and chairs had also been placed for us. He was a very fine old man, and two attendants with hawks stood on the steps of the verandah. A Persian conversation is always preceded by certain set enquiries and replies relative to the health and well-doing of the people in question. When these had been gone through, the conversation became more general, and our love of sport was mentioned to the Governor. All Persians have some feeling for sport. It is their great redeeming feature, and Suleiman Khan fortunately was devoted to it. He begged us to return in September, and promised that everything should be done to assist us. He sent for some pointers with English blood in them, and ordered all his hawks to be brought for our inspection. These he had of three kinds; the smallest sort for hawking partridges or small birds; the larger for pheasants, herons, or larger birds; and the largest, which were more like small eagles, for hawking antelopes. He was evidently devoted to the chase, and was a grand old man with perfect manners. He had known Sir Henry Rawlinson, and mentioned several Englishmen who had been connected with Persia many years before. After an interesting conversation, I named the Expedition to the Gourgan, and requested permission to accompany it. It was immediately evident that some communication had passed

between him and M. Bakouline on this subject, for he became much confused, looked rather sheepish, and said that the Expedition would not go now, that perhaps it would not go at all; with various other lame excuses. M. Bakouline's subsequent explanations made it clearer than ever that, seeing our determination to accompany the Expedition, it had been thought of sufficient importance to use Russian influence to prevent its departure rather than permit such an insight into this part of the country.

The Governor begged us to go out hawking the next day, and offered to send an escort with us, as we were to go in the direction of the Kerasou river; beyond which were Turkoman villages. Here let me explain the curious and anomalous position held by the Turkomans in these parts. The whole northern frontier of Persia, between the Caspian and Afghanistan, borders on the Turkoman country; and that frontier is not defined; it varies according to the inroads of the Turkomans, and the power of the respective Governors to repel those inroads. It may however be assumed that a continual state of border warfare prevails. But as the Turkomans are divided into many tribes, and as each village has its own independent chiefs, Turkoman villages will sometimes settle for a time in a semi-friendly way on Persian ground, and will pay taxes to the Governor, if the Governor has the power to collect them. Notwithstanding the truce between them, individual Turkomans, or small parties belonging to these same villages, will make raids on their own account upon the neighbouring Persians, and capturing men, women, and children, carry them away into the desert, and sell them, or hold them until a ransom can be exacted from the relatives. The Turkoman villages are not held responsible for these raids; and such is the dread of the Turkomans, that two or three have been

known to carry off a dozen Persians, with arms in their hands, without the latter making any resistance.

Their boldness at sea is equally great. A man will put off in a little rough canoe, made out of the trunk of a moderate-sized tree, which looks as if it must sink in the slightest bad weather. He will make his way at night past Ashourada and Perivale, up the great back-water of Ashourada harbour, to the neighbourhood of some Persian village, where he will pounce upon an unsuspecting villager. He binds him hand and foot, and lays him in the bottom of the canoe, and then passing close to the Russian fleet, he will carry off his victim to the shore of his desert retreat. Before the capture of Khiva there was always a ready sale for these poor Persians amongst the Usbegs. Now the principal market has been destroyed, but the system of capturing for the sake of exacting ransom survives.

The Persian or Koord Governors are not one whit behind the Turkomans in cruelty or atrocity. They also will occasionally make raids, killing and destroying, or capturing and holding Turkomans of note, when ransom can probably be compelled. The Turkomans and the Governors benefit by this system, while the poor Persians suffer at the hands of both. The barbarities inflicted on both sides (for one is just as bad as the other) are beyond belief; and yet Turkomans will be seen daily at Astrabad or any of the frontier towns, who come in for purposes of trade, generally to sell horses; and they are allowed to do this with perfect impunity, although they may be notorious as the leaders of *chapaouls*, as these sanguinary raids are called. A regular spy system is maintained both by the Governors and the Turkomans; preparations for a raid on a large scale are duly reported; even the direction it is likely to take is, if possible, indicated. Then

counter preparations are made to resist it; the women and flocks are sent away, and a little battle ensues.

But to return to the Governor. Gladly accepting his hawking invitation, we started off the next morning with an escort of his "irregular horse;" and very serviceable fellows they looked, well mounted on small but well-bred horses; on the whole, more useful-looking animals than the Cossack horses of the Russian irregulars. We went right away to the banks of the Kerasou, which was here little more than a broad ditch, and were within half a mile of the Turkoman village; but our escort did not like to go up to it, lest it should lead to difficulties. We were very unfortunate, but at last found some young pheasants that could not fly far; and the hawks behaved admirably, striking their birds beautifully, and allowing themselves to be caught as if nothing had happened.

As there was no chance of getting to Gourgan, I determined to return to Ashourada the next day. We started (June 9th) early in the morning, and finding that we had very good post-ponies pushed on at a quick pace. When he had got over fully twenty miles, we halted for breakfast; but found it very difficult to get our sailors on at this rate, and Gerome had a bad pony and lagged behind. After breakfast, G—— and C—— dashed on ahead and lost their way; and M. Marquis, Gerome, and the sailors, could not get along; so that in the end I had to ride on by myself with a Cossack guide from the Consulate. On reaching Mirza Suleiman's at Perivale, I found G—— and C—— missing; but to my relief they soon turned up, and in an hour were succeeded by M. Marquis and a sailor. Gerome and the other sailor, however, were far behind. I gave a long lecture on the folly of not keeping to-

gether when in dangerous parts of the country. Mirza Suleiman told us that the Turkomans had been on the road when we passed on our way to Astrabad, and that they had taken some Persians shortly after. There was a man-of-war steamer lying off Perivale, and she sent a boat for us; and soon we saw a large steam launch coming, crowded with all the ladies from Ashourada. The ladies have an extraordinary custom of never wearing bonnets or any head-dress when in the open air; rather a dangerous practice under this burning sun.

Ashourada has a most deadly climate, about on a par with that of the Gold Coast. Although there is excellent sport to be had in the neighbourhood, none of the Russian officers seemed to care about it. In fact, I could not understand how they did amuse themselves. The little island is only a mere sand-bank, with a few small houses, a hospital, some storehouses and other buildings; and existence on it must be most monotonous. Playing cards of an evening seemed to be the main, if not the sole, amusement. In the sickly season almost everyone suffers, and a large proportion die; but we were told that the card-playing went on uninterruptedly, a small saucer of quinine being set on the card-table for use as occasion may require.

We heard that the schooner was ready, that the captain had recovered, and that we could start the next day.

CHAPTER III.

The Attrek—Tchikishlar—Ashourada—Ashreff—Sari—Skirgau—Ziraub—Firoskoh—Serbendan—Boomahoo—Teheran.

ACCORDINGLY we were off at five in the morning, with beautiful weather and a favourable though light breeze. The schooner only drew six feet; yet even then we had to keep some little way from the shore, the water shelving most gradually. We passed Gemushtepe, where M. Vámbéry landed on his interesting and valuable journey to Khiva. Then came a number of Turkoman tents, showing that the place is still inhabited; and everything brought back to my mind his most vivid and accurate narrative. There is a general tendency to doubt the accuracy of travellers who have penetrated to remote and unfamiliar countries; but, wherever I have followed on the steps of M. Vámbéry, I have found his descriptions strikingly correct. Soon after midday we sailed past the mouths of the Gourgan. The land was one long low line of sand, unbroken by any hill except at Gemushtepe, where there is a large mound, looking like a tumulus. This long low shelving shore, with its shallow water, accounts for the immense evaporation that must take place in the Caspian, when we consider that the Oural, Volga, Araxes, and Attrek

rivers, besides numberless smaller streams, run into it, and that there is no outlet.

They were very civil to us on board the schooner, which was a nice weatherly little vessel, and told us many stories of the difficulties they have with the Turkomans. If the Russians want to communicate with the land, they do not send parties ashore, but fire a gun; when the Turkoman boats are bound to come off. If not, shotted guns follow. After the fishing season is over, the small Turkoman canoes are compulsorily brought to Ashourada, and left there until it recommences. The Turkoman sailing-vessels are generally of about six tons, with a draught of only two feet; yet they go right out to sea in bad weather, without any compass or means of navigation save quick eyes and experienced heads.

In the afternoon we anchored off the mouth of the Attrek. The river runs into a broad backwater, with a long low strip of sand sheltering it from the sea, and having only a narrow entrance over a bar with between two and three feet of water. To the left of this passage or entry there is some deeper water, also well protected; and here the Turkoman vessels lie, and this is the site of a small Turkoman village. There were nearly twenty of these vessels at the time we visited it. Having reconnoitred, I asked the captain if we had not better make the most of the fair wind and get on to Tchikishlar; but a difficulty now arose. The captain said he had not been told to proceed beyond the Attrek, and it was impossible that he could exceed his instructions. It was in vain that I reminded him of my conversation with the Port Captain, in his presence, relative to Tchikishlar. He was dogged; but I was equally determined that I would see Tchikishlar.

"The Grand Duke gave me permission to visit the place," I said, "and I feel bound to go there. If therefore your instructions will not permit you to proceed, we must return to Ashourada for fresh instructions. I greatly regret that it will give you the trouble of two journeys, now that we are within ten miles of the place; but, if you cannot take upon yourself to go farther, what is to be done?" "I am sure," he replied, "that I am not mistaken. The Port Captain did not intend you to go on to Tchikishlar." "In that case," I said, "I must write to Tiflis to the Grand Duke. Meanwhile, we can go and shoot in the mountains. It will cause much delay, and I fear additional trouble to you; but orders are orders, and, if you cannot proceed, what else can we do?"

The captain did not like this reasoning, I could see. He went below to cogitate. In about half-an-hour he came up.

"I am afraid," he said, "I must take upon myself to go on. I do not like to disappoint you."

I thanked him for his kindness. During this half-hour, however, the wind had shifted, and it was now dead ahead; so we had to beat, and, as it soon afterwards got dark, we turned in. At daybreak we found ourselves at anchor off Tchikishlar, some little way from the land, and jumping into the gig rowed in shore. We saw at once the absurdity of the fuss which had been made in England about this place. No Russian troops were there. The so-called fort is a common square breastwork of sand, and the place was now only occupied by Turkomans. There were a good many of their tents. The Russians encamped here because the water is good, and a line of wells is supposed to extend hence to Khiva. However, as we already know, the Markosoff column

which started from here for Khiva was beaten back by natural difficulties; and I am convinced that Tchikishlar strategically is quite unimportant.

Having noted all the little that was to be seen, we went on board and set sail for Ashouradà. We coasted along in only about eight feet of water, our wake stirring up the sand, which left a yellow line astern; and within a couple of hours we were again off the Attrek. But the wind was now increasing, and the weather looked threatening, so the captain began to stand off the shore. It is all very well to cruise about with only two feet of water under your keel in very fine weather, but it is vastly different when it begins to blow. We kept the lead going, but the water deepened very slowly. "Ten feet!" they cried; but the wind began to howl ominously, and the captain looked out to sea with an anxious eye. "I trust we are not going to have a westerly gale," said M. Marquis; "for in a few hours a tremendous sea and surf run on this coast, and woe betide any vessel that is caught in shallow water. As the waves rise, she is sure to bump her bottom out, and there is no hope of getting on shore for the surf." "Twelve feet!" cried the man at the lead; but just then the wind shifted suddenly. I looked at the compass. It was due west, and it was now a dead beat off the shore. But the little schooner was doing marvellously, and clawing well to windward. As yet, although there were ominous signs of bad weather, there was not much sea on; but we knew how quickly it would rise.

"Fourteen feet!" was the next cry. The little vessel was beginning to plunge, and, when she did so, a yellow patch left astern proved how the sand was disturbed. The wind was increasing fast; it was beginning to blow hard, and we shortened sail; but we still carried as much

as we could. "Seventeen feet!" It was blowing half a gale, and the sea rising rapidly; but the stout little craft, close-hauled, was behaving splendidly, and still clawing steadily off the shore.

"In twenty feet," said the captain, "we shall do well, unless it is very bad." But we hung at nineteen feet for some time, and we began to doubt if we were getting to windward, until "Twenty-one feet" was suddenly called, when we found we had been passing a shallow bank. In a few minutes more we were in deep water; but it was now blowing a perfect gale, and the sea in-shore, where we had been so recently, was one long line of surf. It was a narrow escape; and, had not the little vessel behaved so well, nothing could have saved us. We got well tossed about, and were not sorry, late in the afternoon, to sight the lightship that marks the passage into the backwater of Ashourada. Once there, we were in comparatively calm water, and we beat up to Ashourada island, arriving just at dusk. Thus, instead of a month, we had been absent only forty hours. To our delight, the steamer for Enzelli was still lying in the harbour. We rushed on shore and inquired when she would start, as she should have left that afternoon, but found she was waiting for the gale to moderate. We passed the evening at the house of the Port Captain. I thanked him for all the trouble he had taken for us, and we had an amicable conversation, with the expression of all sorts of good wishes for the 'entente cordiale" between our two countries. "It is all nonsense," exclaimed Mdme. Sideroff, with good humour; "England and Russia are natural enemies. Their interests are, and ever must be, antagonistic, and it is of no use pretending that it is otherwise."

ON A LEE SHORE OFF THE MOUTH OF THE ATTREK

There can be no doubt that in Central Asia this view is generally held. The Russians are the most chivalrous and charming enemies, and very pleasant friends; but in the far East it is seen more clearly than we realize at home, how difficult must be the future relations between the two countries. Russia holds nearly all the north of Asia, for the most part a barren waste, while in the south lie India and China, a sort of paradise of fertility and wealth in Russian imaginations. Talk of India and the south to a Russian officer whose lot is cast in these dreary desolate lands, and his eyes glisten again as he tells you strange stories he has read and feasted upon of all its glorious Oriental luxury and riches. Talk to him of cholera, of fever, and all the ills that so often thin our ranks in Hindostan, and his countenance will fall as if you had dispelled a dream of future happiness. No! Disguise it as we may, plan as we may in London and St. Petersburg, to the hard workers in these desert wilds, India is the Land of Promise which they some day hope to reach; and, as every decade sees their frontier line approach nearer and nearer by many hundreds of miles, can we wonder that hope grows high within them as the distant vision seems to draw so close, and that the desire to annex and gain fresh territory becomes almost a mania?

The next morning the gale was at its height, and they told us it often lasted four days. Four days more at Ashourada! It was a serious prospect. We therefore held a consultation and decided that, unless there was a change for the better, we would start next day for Teheran over the mountains, having heard that we should be able to get ponies from stage to stage, and that, although there would be many delays, we should

probably do the distance, about 300 miles, in five or six days. That afternoon we went down to the Turkoman tents at Ashourada. The Russians maintain a little colony of Turkoman agents on this island, and, whenever any information or report is required, these agents are sent into the interior, where a liberal expenditure of money will nearly always buy over any tribe to Russian interests. These Turkomans were most amusing fellows, and unbounded was their curiosity when they heard we were Englishmen. In their eyes, as in Mdme. Sideroff's, English and Russians are natural enemies; but they were most civil to us, and took the greatest delight in showing their habitations.

A Turkoman tent is the most comfortable migratory dwelling-place that man has yet devised. At first sight, it looks heavy; the arrangement appears complicated; and it seems as if it would take a long time to strike and pack: but, when people are accustomed to them, this is not the case; and, where camel transport can be used, there is nothing in the shape of a tent that approaches them in comfort. For the information of the uninitiated, let me explain that a so-called Turkoman tent is circular. The skeleton framework is composed of the bamboo-like reed which is so common in every Persian or Central Asian marsh. These are fastened together in pieces easily transportable. When a tent has to be pitched, these small reed-frames are connected with each other and form the skeleton framework of the circular tent, with a small opening at the top but without any central pole. This framework is covered with large pieces of felt, which lie outside and are tied inside to the reeds. Thus a circular dwelling is erected with a hole in the centre; and over this hole fits a circular piece of felt, which can cover it or be removed according

to the weather. Some of the tents are twenty feet in diameter, and the absence of a pole in the centre gives a considerable amount of accommodation. The length of the pieces of framework makes it difficult to carry these tents on mules; and, as baggage in any of the mountainous parts of North Persia must be so carried, they are not then suitable; but for travelling in the plains with camel transport they would be charming. They are not expensive, costing about £5, and are very durable. The Turkoman women pitch the tents, and I was told four of them could do this in twenty minutes. I doubt the information.

At night we were taken to the Ashourada Club. There was not a very large assembly, and card-playing, as usual, was the only amusement. When I say the only amusement, I am wrong; for Russian hospitality is proverbial, and both a strong head and a strong stomach are requisite for a traveller in these parts. How the Russians themselves can stand the fiery compounds they are for ever pouring down their throats in these far distant lands, I cannot understand. Besides *vodky*, all along the Caspian shores one is dosed with so-called port and sherry. The port is a white compound, which actually has on the label the name of the Russian factory where it is made; and the sherry comes from the same establishment: but they have the monopoly of the Caspian. How one did long for some milder beverage, for the heavy wines of the Caucasus were as water by comparison. We found that C——'s friend, the Colonel of Engineers, was to have been our companion on board the steamer. His wife, we were told, would be greatly relieved by our change of plans, for she had attributed her husband's headache to C——'s convivial nature; and, when she heard that there was a

probability of a fresh meeting between the two, she had exclaimed, "Ah! quel malheur!"

Bidding adieu to our warm-hearted entertainers, we started the next morning on the little steamer which M. Marquis commanded, for Kara Tepe, which lies some way up the backwater. We had determined, though it was out of our way, to visit Ashreff, the old Palace of Shah Abbas. As we proceeded westwards, the backwater soon shallowed to about eight feet; and west of the island of Ashourada lies the long low strip of mainland which shelters this backwater from the sea. This is covered with jungle, and we were told, just as we were going away, that it was full of game. In this one strip the Shah, who came down here on a visit the year before, killed nine red-deer; and there are often tigers as well. Of course, at this season the red-deer's head would have been in velvet; but we regretted that our friends had not given us all this information before.

We disembarked at the landing-place for Kara Tepe, and after waiting a short time our ponies appeared. The village was about four miles distant. The women of this village were quite of a different type from the Persians generally, and some we saw would have passed as gipsies. There was one very pretty girl with a perfect gipsy countenance; and, unlike most Mahomedan women, they were careless in concealing their faces. The people of the place made a desperate attempt to keep us here for the night; but I had determined to reach Ashreff, which was seven miles away, and after some trouble we pushed on. Here we bade adieu to M. Marquis, who had piloted us during our whole stay at Ashourada with the greatest energy and civility.

It was so late before reaching the palace that we

could see but little. It is a very well-preserved ruin, and might easily be made habitable. The gardens must have been pretty, but are of the regular Persian type, with the usual water-tanks, orange-trees, &c. We climbed to the upper storey and arranged ourselves for the night; but how the frogs did croak! I have made acquaintance with the frogs of many lands, but the Persian are by far and away the noisiest of their species. We were up early the next morning, exploring the place; but could not start as soon as was intended, for the horses did not make their appearance.

The Shah has a new palace, or rather hunting-lodge, only a few miles from Ashreff, but more in the hills, called Sophiabbas.

It was nearly ten o'clock before the horses arrived, thus giving us the first impression of Persian delays; which proved to be an almost invariable rule afterwards. On leaving Ashreff, we followed for a considerable distance what had evidently once been a paved high road. Roads are so rare in Persia that the traveller looks back to the trace of one as a great curiosity. We had a long stage before us to Sari—thirty-five miles—and the horses were very indifferent. The road ran at the foot of the hills, and the country was undulating and wooded or cultivated. It follows the base of the mountains, intercepted often by deep gulleys; one more important than the rest, and deserving the name of river, is crossed by a massive brick bridge. The day was excessively hot, and the horses were very much done before we approached Sari. We were not sorry, therefore, to come across a curious old well of most wonderfully cold water, as clear as crystal, on the left of the road. Good water is so scarce in Persia that, when met with, it is thoroughly appreciated. A Persian well, I may add,

is not an ordinary well. You generally descend to it by a number of steps covered over by a high archway; from the top of which stalactites and ferns often hang suspended, giving to these old wells a very pretty appearance.

Just before entering Sari we crossed the river Firinbad by a long brick bridge of seventeen pointed arches. This is the grandest and most important bridge that I saw in all Persia. It has evidently been extensively repaired at some time; the original structure is supposed to have been erected by Shah Abbas.

There are very few permanent buildings to be found in Persia. Everything has a temporary and makeshift look; but nine times out of ten, if you come across any ruin of more than ordinary beauty, or any work of public utility, you may be sure that it dates back to Shah Abbas; while any fortification that is carried out with some degree of common sense may invariably be traced to the time of Nadir Shah.

We went straight to the house of the Russian Mirza, who forthwith provided us with quarters in the dwelling of a Khan living at Sari. Nothing could exceed the politeness we met with. Cool sherbet was prepared, and soon afterwards the Khan himself arrived. The task of interpreting was difficult. The Mirza, however, spoke Turkish and Persian; so the Khan spoke to the Mirza in Persian, the Mirza translated into Turkish for Gerome, and Gerome retranslated into French for us. The Khan said that the Governor was most anxious that we should remain the next day and pay him a visit; but it was explained that we were obliged to hurry on, and we begged that he would kindly give an order for postponies at the different stations, as we desired to arrive at Teheran as soon as possible. This order was immediately

promised, and the Governor sent word that we must allow him to send us a Persian dinner. In due time this appeared: pilau, kabob, and all the regular Persian dishes. It was excellent; but he went further, and actually sent some claret. This was civility indeed on the part of a Mahomedan.

Sari is the seat of government for a very considerable district, including Barfrush, Amol and a large part of the low country of Mazanderan, and the hills to the south. During our short stay here a most singular character appeared. He was an Indian, and must, I fancy, have been in our service; but he gave no distinct account of himself. He spoke a few words of English and had a curiously accurate knowledge of different articles in English use. For instance, he knew a compass by name, and explained its action to the Persians; also a measuring tape and an aneroid barometer. He was most officious, and could tell the English names of some of the medicines in my chest by their smell. At last, he got hold of a bottle of the strongest ammonia, which nearly knocked him backwards, and considerably cooled his ardour: but he was so forward that we had to explain to the Khan that we did not require his company any longer. The fellow was an utter puzzle, and I never found out his history. He was too young to have been connected with the mutiny, except as a mere boy.

We had already become aware that at whatever time you may wish to start in Persia, you never get off till two or three hours afterwards. Four o'clock had been appointed, and it was half-past six before we were *en route*. For the first sixteen miles we passed through a rich country at the base of the hills, every now and then coming across the remains of what was evidently the

road of Shah Abbas with an occasional brick bridge. Then we began gradually to ascend through high but thick jungle. It looked a magnificent country for game, but we saw no signs of either beast or bird beyond a few tracks of wild boar. At last we reached Skirgau, very prettily situated, with a river running to the right, some open grassy ground along the road, and fine forest on the left. Here we halted for about two hours, while they sent to the village for fresh ponies.

Skirgau is 550 feet above Sari. We got very fair ponies at this station, and pushed on to Ziraub, sixteen miles. The road from Skirgau to Ziraub is one of the most beautiful that I ever travelled; it ascends through the most perfect woodland scenery that it is possible to imagine. Giant trees interlaced with splendid creepers, deep dark dells revelling in every variety of the fern tribe, box-trees as thick as a man's waist, with a roaring stream dashing down the valley below, made a scene which I had only seen equalled by some of the mountain passes in Ceylon. How we gloried in that ride. And how little did we think that not many weeks would elapse before two of us would be ascending that very path again, deprived, alas! of our third cheery companion! The aneroid showed that we had ascended 1150 feet since leaving Skirgau. Before reaching Ziraub we left the forest, and came upon open and cultivated ground. We now had our first experience of a Persian road. It was a mere track, now winding like a sheep-walk round a rocky ridge, now running down into the marshy and cultivated fields below. In some places it was positively dangerous, and impressed us much. A few weeks later, and we looked upon it as a perfect highway.

Ziraub was a wretched station. There were no horses

at the post-house, and it was just getting dark; but, determined to push on, we sent off for a guide and ponies from the village. We could get nothing to eat, but had some hard-boiled eggs and a few oranges with us, on which we made our dinners, and managed to concoct some tea. Then we lay down under a shed, and had a short uncomfortable sleep. It was a feverish-looking spot, and the valley was a succession of rice-fields. At about ten o'clock the ponies appeared, and a guide. What a ride we had that night! We could see nothing, but followed the guide in single file, and gave the ponies their heads. The river was roaring below us, and every moment we expected to be tumbled into it. Sometimes the ponies missed their footing, and only righted themselves with a struggle. The road evidently ascended considerably, and it was just daylight when we arrived at the next station, Sufferabad (2500 feet, 25 miles), after scrambling along all night.

The scenery had now changed. There was no longer a semblance of forest, but high, rocky, barren, basaltic mountains, with a few scrubby dwarf shrubs. We tried to get something to eat at this station, but after waiting some time they could only produce three eggs; so we again pushed on, and now commenced gradually ascending a pass. The last part, about thirteen miles from Sufferabad, was very steep; and when we reached the top (6800 feet), the air was cool and refreshing, although the sun was powerful. There was an old ruined caravanserai to the left of the road, while before us extended large undulating plains, with high mountains away to our right as far as the eye could reach. We here got a first idea of the barren desert aspect of the country that characterises the greater part of Persia, and

through which, with but a few bright spots, we were to wander for many months and for so many hundreds of miles.

We halted for two hours at the head of the pass, and then pushed on for Firoskoh, ten miles beyond. We came to the post-house about three miles before reaching Firoskoh, but, the ponies wanting shoeing, we had to go into the town to get them shod. Our appearance created quite a sensation, for few Europeans had ever passed up this road. We rode on about six miles farther, and, as it was then quite dark, halted for four hours in a village. It was very cold; so we made a fire and lay down on some carpets in a large court-yard of the principal house in the village, and had a good sleep; but could get nothing to eat except some bread and the few oranges that were left. We started at about two o'clock in the morning, and had a long tiring march, descending a rocky barren pass, where we saw a good many francolin, and some partridges and hares. G—— and Gerome went shooting, but without success. On arriving at Serbendan (thirty-six miles) we missed the post-station, and went all round the village before finding it.

This was a much better station. Carpets and cushions were provided, and plenty of eggs; so Gerome set to work to manufacture an omelette, and C—— came in to report his discovery of a beautifully retired stream, where we could bathe conveniently.

After breakfast and a rest, we again rode on to Boomahoo (thirty-two miles), arriving there after dark. We had now crossed the mountains and descended into the plains: the road was most tedious, barren, and uninteresting, constantly ascending and descending the little spurs of the hills. We slept on the top of a house

at Boomahoo, and started for Teheran (thirty-two miles) the next morning. I was quite surprised when the post-ponies arrived. Instead of the wretched sleepy beasts we had been accustomed to, C—— had a remarkably good-looking grey, and I a well-shaped wiry little bay, full of life and spirit. Carrying heavy saddle-bags and a gun, I could not have been riding less than eighteen stone; yet my pony made nothing of it, and I could scarcely hold him. The first twenty miles we did at a fast pace, and then halted for breakfast. Close by was a tempting pool surrounded by trees, and we could not resist a bathe, although in the heat of the sun the practice is dangerous.

Before us now lay a vast plain with, far away, something which looked like a large town. To our right rose a most striking mountain (Elburz, 13,000 feet), while in the distance the arid, flat country was dotted with little green patches, marking the different villages which surround Teheran. Lying right under Elburz, in the far distance, were many such green spots. The ponies were as fresh as ever, and the road, though stony, was flat and good; so as they were very eager, we let them go, and they galloped all the way into Teheran without stopping. The heat was terrific, and every now and then a scorching blast came over the plain as if the door of an oven had suddenly been opened. At last we saw the walls of Teheran before us, and passing through a high gateway, where some sleepy-looking Persian soldiers were on guard, entered the town.

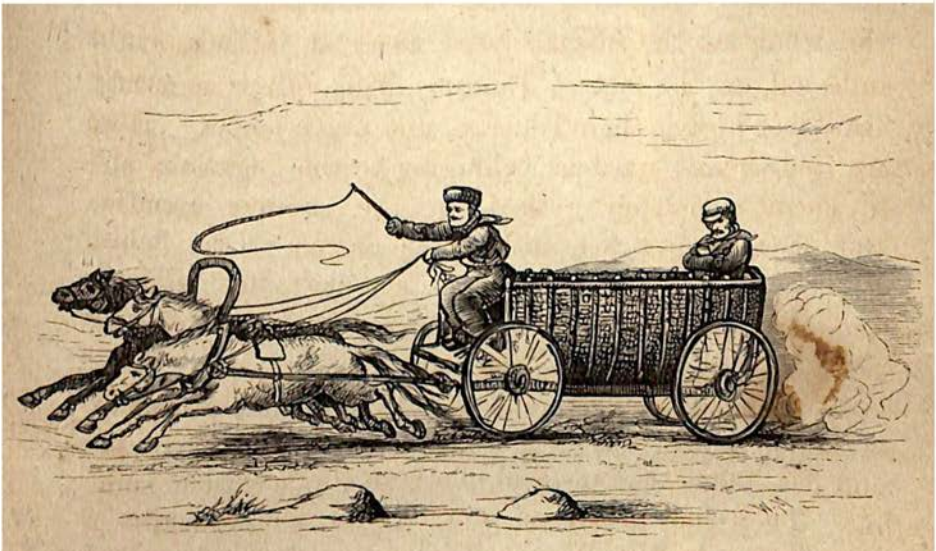
It was the middle of the day, and no one was about We had left Gerome far behind, and could not find our way. In the distance, however, we caught sight of a building that towered above the rest and looked the

most important edifice in the town. "That must be the Shah's palace," said I; "we shall get some information there; and we went towards it. There was a large arched gateway, with most imposing iron gates. Judge of our delight upon reaching that gateway to see two letters carved in the stone—two letters that reminded us of home, and England, and many other fond memories, and told their story at a glance — V. R.! We knew we were at the British Legation. Riding through a pretty but unfinished garden to a handsome but scarcely completed house, we soon made out that the whole of the officials were away at Gulhek, eight miles off, at the foot of Elburz. This village is nearly 1000 feet higher than Teheran, and much cooler. Here are houses and gardens belonging to the Legation, and to them everybody retires for the summer months. But there was a servant left in charge of the house at Teheran, who ushered us into a very nice billiard-room and produced bowls of sherbet and quantities of ice. How we did enjoy that luxury!

In the afternoon Captain Pearson, who, in the absence of Major Smith, was in charge of the Indian telegraph, and Dr. Baker, the medical officer to the Legation, came in. They had heard of our arrival and brought a message from Mr. Thomson, the minister, asking me to come to his house, while C—— and G—— were to stay with them. I drove out with Dr. Baker along a very fair carriage-road to Gulhek, but only in the neighbourhood of Teheran are there any such roads. In other parts of Persia wheeled vehicles are not to be found.

Mr. Thomson's residence at Gulhek was very pleasantly situated in a large shady garden, and in front of the house were two gigantic Indian tents, which formed

the dining-room. I was most kindly received by him and by Mr. Smyth, the Secretary to the Legation. It seemed quite strange to sit down again, dressed as in England, to a good civilized dinner, and with English faces around us. The next day I literally revelled in rest. I sat in the large Indian tent, surrounded with copies of 'The Times,' and read up all the back news, enjoying myself thoroughly in doing nothing.



EASTERN POSTING.

CHAPTER IV.

Gulhek—Prospects of Sport—The Vermin of Persia—Eastern Bazaars—Carpets—Antiques—Vigilant Sentries.

WE reached Gulhek on the 18th June, and for the first few days after our arrival indulged in entire repose. We had heard nothing of our baggage at Reshdt, but shortly a note came from Captain Abbott, our Consul there, telling us that it was in his charge, and that he was engaging a muleteer to transport it to Teheran, but feared there would be a little delay.

Around Gulhek there are many similar villages, and in these reside the members of the other Legations, namely, those of Russia, Austria, France and Turkey; so there is a considerable European society. Captain Pearson and Dr. Baker lived together, and possessed a billiard-table; and their hospitable house was a general resort of an afternoon.

We had many arrangements to make, servants to engage, horses to buy, &c., &c. Hearing that there was very fair shooting and excellent trout-fishing to be had in the mountains, I determined to make our way slowly towards the East at a high elevation during the great heats of July, and then to push on to Meshed in August; after that we should act as circumstances might dictate.

I had been so pleased with the post-pony that carried me into Teheran that I sent to buy him; but could not succeed for nearly a fortnight, and when he did appear he had been terribly knocked about. From some fancied resemblance to his great namesake, I called him Cremorne, and he did credit to the name. A better little animal never lived, nor one more peculiar in his ways. On the plains he was so fiery and impetuous that it was difficult to hold him, but in the mountains he was lazy and as quiet as a sheep. He was an admirable shooting-pony, and, when stalking in the mountains, I used to leave him for hours by himself; and he never moved half-a-dozen yards from the spot. He was very fast, and the most untiring little animal I ever came across, and he could scramble over places in the mountains where one would have thought nothing but a goat could keep its footing. C—— bought a very handsome little animal, which he dubbed Macaroni, and G—— also invested in a black pony of a very useful sort.

I engaged a servant named Shaab, who had previously accompanied Sir F. Goldsmid on his trip along the Perso-Afghan boundary, and had been in both Bombay and England, and spoke English fairly. He was an Arab by birth, but a Persian in address. His manners, indeed, were excellent; but I was told that he had one great failing—a love of enriching himself at his master's expense. G—— engaged a man named Zenil Abdeen. Shaab was a great help to us, thoroughly understanding as he did how to organize the Expedition; and we set to work to find the necessary additional servants and muleteers. When all calculations had been made, we found that our train would be formidable. Servants in Persia will not walk as in India; each man must

have his mule. Thus, what with tents, guns, ammunition and supplies, we reckoned that our party would require nineteen mules. Even the horse-keepers in Persia have to be mounted, and they are a lazy, careless set, very different from their Indian prototypes.

And now, while the Expedition is organizing, let me give some account of the preparations I had made for sport.

From inquiries instituted in authoritative Persian circles, it did not appear that Persia was what may be termed a good shooting-country. There were, I was told, moufflon and ibex on the mountains, red-deer in the jungles of the low countries, and also tigers; but the jungles were reported to be so thick that to get either of the latter was well-nigh impossible. There were wild asses near Meshed on the plains; partridges and small game were generally to be found; and in the winter enormous quantities of swans, geese, ducks and all kinds of wild fowl swarmed on the large backwater at Enzelli.

My armament consisted of a double-barrelled No. 12 rifle by Laing, carrying 5 drachms of powder and a rather heavy ball—the perfection of a useful rifle for all sorts of game; a Westley Richards Express; my old shoulder single-barrelled duck-gun No. 4, which carried a ball beautifully up to eighty yards, and with 8 drachms of powder would be a most formidable weapon for tigers; and a double-barrelled No. 12 Purdey gun. I had also a revolver of very large bore by Holland, somewhat heavy until one got accustomed to it, the barrel and all the works silvered with nickel. This is the greatest possible comfort, as it entirely prevents rust. During the whole Expedition one wore a revolver, just as constantly and as naturally as a shirt. Night and day it never left my side, and one never moved a step without it. And let me ad-

vise anyone travelling in these wild countries to adopt the same system. The fact of its being known that you are never to be found unarmed produces a very salutary effect.

How difficult it is to find out beforehand what is most useful in a strange country! I had knocked about in most parts of the world, and had an idea that cheap watches, and some ordinary breech-loading military rifles would be useful as presents; but was recommended not to take them. They would have proved invaluable. I had also made considerable preparations for fishing, and brought both salmon and trout rods, and all their necessary adjuncts, together with a very large supply of flies of all kinds; besides clothes and boots, suitable for both winter and summer, saddlery, and a small portable India-rubber boat, intended for the ducks at Enzelli. We had not forgotten supplies, of which the most useful were Harvey and Worcester sauce, celery salt, and baking-powder; and Whitehead's cakes of soup, pea and mulligatawny, which when mixed with Liebig's extract of meat are excellent. Then we had a small chest of tools; a large box of instruments for surveying and taking observations, and all sorts of articles likely to prove necessary. Multiply most of these things by three, add tents for the servants, and an Indian tent which Captain Pearson lent us for ourselves; and the number of mules required will not seem so extraordinary.

I shall never forget the opening of the box of supplies on its arrival at Teheran. The jolting on the road from Tiflis to Baku had produced the most disastrous results: —baking-powder and Liebig, insect-powder and Worcester sauce, tea and broken bottles, were all mixed up together into a compound impossible to describe. I had been recommended to bring quantities of insect-powder, but found it useless. The vermin of Persia are quite

beyond insect-powder: you might as well try to put out Vesuvius with a watering-pot. We soon gave it up in despair, and made up our minds for the worst.

Our enjoyment of Teheran was soon rather disagreeably broken, for I was laid up with an attack of fever; but, thanks to Dr. Baker's kind care, quickly recovered. Just as I was getting better, I heard that C—— had been taken ill with cholera, and, on going down to see him, found that he was utterly prostrated. It was either cholera or a form of Mazanderan fever, which closely resembles it; and, although he rallied quickly and was soon about again, he evidently was completely shaken. His fresh and cheery spirits, I fear, induced him to do too much, for it was evident that he was sadly amiss.

G—— and I used to go into Teheran sometimes, hunting for Persian carpets and curiosities; but the heat was intense. No Eastern bazaars are more interesting than those of Teheran, and anyone living there might make a most valuable collection of Eastern antique curiosities. One of the attachés to the French Legation, who devoted himself to this object, told me that he had sent some rare specimens of ancient work to Paris. With regard to Persian carpets, an impression prevails that you have only to go to Persia to obtain them in profusion. This is quite true with regard to the commoner qualities; but it is not so with the highest class of carpets. These are only made for ministers or great people about the Court, and fetch fabulous prices. You might as well go into the shop of a London picture-dealer and ask for a Guido as expect to find one of the highest class carpets in the shop of a bazaar-man of Teheran. These fine carpets are of exquisite colouring and workmanship. They are used for sitting, and not for walking upon. The Minister of Finance had just

died in difficulties, and some of his carpets were for sale. I bought one and G—— two; and some of our friends at Teheran told us that, although they had been there so many years, they had never seen any of higher quality. We also purchased some curious old knives and other magnificent specimens of ancient handicraft in steel and gold. The brass work of Persia is justly celebrated, and the modern is quite as ingenious as the ancient. Specimens, very judiciously selected by Major Smith, R.E., have recently been purchased for the Kensington Museum. I saw them on my return to Teheran, and presume they have arrived ere this.

While in Teheran, we had opportunities of seeing something of the Persian soldiers, and Colonel A., an Italian officer who superintends the drill of the troops quartered there, gave me much useful information.

There are generally nine or ten battalions retained in the neighbourhood of Teheran, and these are in very fair order, and well armed and equipped; but the battalions away in the provinces are usually in the most lamentable condition. The men are of a fair class. The battalions are from 800 to 900 strong, and, if properly officered, would not be bad troops, for the Persians are hardy and admirable marchers; in fact, no people in the world can equal them in the latter quality. I will give one or two examples. Once, when in the mountains, sixty miles from Teheran, and 8000 feet above the sea, I wanted to send a letter to the Legation. A youth who offered to take it and bring an answer, started about one o'clock in the afternoon of a Tuesday; and on the Wednesday I moved the camp seventeen miles farther on. Late on Thursday night he was at the new camp, after having been detained some hours at Teheran. He had done 137 miles in a mountainous country in

this time! Again: once, when near Meshed, a man arrived in camp with letters. He was in the habit of carrying them between Meshed and Teheran, and he usually did the distance, 550 miles, in ten days.

The artillery at Teheran were not badly trained, but they were carelessly turned out; and the calibres were various. The Shah has also a camel corps, but no regular cavalry. At our Legation at Gulhek there used always to be an infantry guard. The sentries amused me much. On going out of the gate, one generally found the sentry in a light and easy costume, cooking. On seeing me, he would make a rush for his rifle, put on his sheep-skin cap, usually hind part before, and immediately "present arms."

During this visit to Teheran the Shah was in Europe, and it was curious in the evening, at dinner, to get by the telegraph a report of his doings that day in London, together with any other events of an interesting nature. Mr. Thomson had kindly arranged that I should go into Teheran with him and pay a visit to the head of the Government, and thus have an opportunity of seeing the palace; but I was too unwell with fever to attempt it.

The sport in the immediate neighbourhood of Gulhek was of the poorest description, consisting only of a few quails and hares; but we were told that on the top of Elburz, only eight hours' ride, there were moufflon and ibex in abundance, and the megaloperdrix, or great partridge, a magnificent bird, but rather rare. All the baggage had arrived from Reshdt, and our preparations were completed. We received many warning reports of the difficulties and dangers on our route, but I am afraid they did not make a deep impression upon us; and, all being reported ready, we determined to start for the mountains.

CHAPTER V.

Elburz—Reduction of our party—The Dooab—Wellaterood—Loula—Shemsha—The Gargerood—The Lar—Trout-fishing.

At five o'clock on the morning of July 13th, we got under weigh, and soon commenced the ascent of Elburz. The road or track was execrable, but Cremorne and the other ponies were as sure-footed as mules. Bare, desolate rock, nothing could be more uninteresting except for the glorious view of the plains below as we rapidly ascended to a great height. By eleven o'clock we were 10,000 feet above the level of the sea, but the mountain still towered above us; and about 2000 feet higher we crossed the head of the pass. Elburz was still nearly 1000 feet above to our right; and below us we observed a large circular plain, that looked as if it had once been a great crater, for there were volcanic-looking hills all round it. Patches of snow were about the high peaks, but none on this plain.

Finding a stream of water, we pitched our tent near it. The aneroids showed 11,900 feet above the sea. It was Sunday, so we could not shoot; but I determined to go for a walk to survey the country, and look for signs of game. I soon ascended some of the hills, but they were heart-breaking to a deer-stalker. It seemed as if it had rained little stone tiles; the whole country was covered

with them; and as you walked they rattled against each other with a musical tinkling sound. It was impossible to avoid it. I picked my steps with the greatest care imaginable, but the result was exactly the same. I had not gone more than a mile, when I suddenly became aware of the same tinkling sound high up on a mountain to my left. I had never seen moufflon, and it is curious how difficult it is at first to detect an animal to whose colour and shape you are unaccustomed. After looking for some little time, I made out seven moufflon on a mountain above. They had seen me and were making off. I followed them, although without a gun, for I wanted to watch their habits, and had not gone very far when a scurry amongst the loose rocks to the right attracted my attention, and twelve moufflon dashed past within about 400 yards' distance. This was decidedly encouraging. I now ascended the high mountains in front of me. The herd first disturbed had joined some others, and I counted more than forty passing over the sky-line. I had imagined that moufflons would more resemble sheep in appearance, but found them to be thoroughly of the deer tribe. The horns are somewhat like those of a ram, only not so curved, and utterly unlike those of the Ovis Ammon of India or the Big Horn of America.

As evening came on, I turned my steps homewards and trudged back to camp. The walking was most difficult, and I little knew how much my fever had pulled me down until utterly exhausted. Struggling on, I at length saw the tents not two miles below, but could only stagger along a few hundred yards at a time. Some snow refreshed me a little, and by dint of frequent halts I got in to camp. G—— administered a strong jorum of brandy-and-water, and

I found he had another patient. Poor C—— was suffering from fever consequent on his recent attack. This was a bad beginning; but the cold was intense, and we were much in hopes that a few days of this pure mountain air might work wonders. But the night was so bitter that we determined to move on and descend to ground some 3000 feet lower the next day.

July 14th.—C—— was better in the morning, but not well enough to shoot; so he rode on with the mules to pitch the camp, while G—— and I went off with our rifles after the moufflon I had seen the evening before. We had not gone far when we stumbled across a shepherd watching a herd of sheep and goats, and persuaded him to come with us. Our guide evidently knew what he was about; but made us follow him in entirely a different direction, where he said we were certain to find sport.

After descending about 2000 feet below the site of our morning's camp, we ascended the mountains on the other side. At last we came to what our stalker evidently considered a likely spot, and as of course we had our glasses with us we sat down and spied. We soon sighted a single ibex, but he had evidently seen the ponies and was making off; and at length we reached the top of the ridge. Here our guide said we must leave the ponies and follow him. As we could not both go, on account of the horses, we tossed up, and G—— won. He went off with our guide, and I stayed behind and revelled in the lovely view. Below me was a precipice of about 2000 feet, and I looked down nearly 8000 feet into a green valley, with a little stream running through it. Lower still lay Teheran, a mere patch to view, and the villages about it seeming like green spots in the

distance; and far away towards the south stretched an endless barren desert plain until it was lost in the haze. As I gazed, and thought of the fiery scorching blasts that were sweeping over those sandy wastes, how I drank in the cold pure air of the mountains and enjoyed the feeling of returning health!

G—— was away about an hour, and came back with the information that they had seen three different lots of moufflon, and that he had managed to get two shots, but at long distances and without result. Mounting our ponies, we rode along the ridge for about a mile, when we again dismounted. G—— now watched the horses while I went off with our guide. He was very valuable, for difficult as it is when deer-stalking in Scotland for a stranger to have any idea of the different currents of wind, it was far more difficult here. We wandered on for some distance without seeing anything, until suddenly my guide stopped and crouched. About 700 yards from us was a small doe lying down; and on getting out my glass I could descry the horns of a nice buck just below her. The wind was apparently all right, but it was most awkward stalking, for there were no large rocks between us and them, and the whole mountain side was one mass of those wretched noisily musical stones. It was slow work, for we had to pick our steps most carefully, and even then a sudden rattling clatter would bring one's heart into one's mouth.

We took advantage of a little undulation in the ground, and after a slight detour, the wind being different for a short distance, gradually and cautiously raised our heads, until we saw the tips of the doe's ears twitching, about 250 yards off. I was anxious to get nearer, and we had lost sight of the buck, but knew of course from the position of the doe that he

was undisturbed; so, motioning my guide to stop, I crept cautiously on. Those next fifty yards were most critical, but I got safely over them into a little hollow that concealed me. I could now again just detect the horns of the buck; and found that I must creep farther on in order to get a view of any part of his body; but the ground was hopeless, and after getting about twenty yards nearer I saw there was no chance of approaching farther unobserved. Still I could only just see the base of his horns. There was nothing more to be done; so, rising to a kneeling position, I gave a slight whistle. In an instant the doe was on her legs, and in another moment up jumped the buck, presenting a nice long shot. The echo of the little 'Express' rang out amongst the rocky cliffs, and as the smoke cleared the little doe was galloping wildly down the mountain side; but the buck's heels were in the air, and he was lying stone-dead with a ball through the neck. My guide, a Mahomedan, dashed off with my knife, under the pretence that it was still alive, to cut its throat.

This was a successful first stalk, but I saw at once, by the nature of the ground, that one would usually have to rest content with very long shots. This is always most unsatisfactory. One often reads in books of great sporting characters who invariably kill their deer dead at 250 and 300 yards. It has been my lot to shoot with some of the best sportsmen and best rifle shots in the world, and I never have seen this accuracy. On the contrary, when these long shots have to be taken, a number of animals often go away wounded, and there is nothing so distressing to a true sportsman as thus to cause unnecessary and useless suffering.

It was the first shot I had fired at game with my little 'Express,' and it had certainly made a terrible

wound. I was, in fact, not accustomed to shoot with an Express, and must confess, that with all the power they occasionally show, I would rather have a larger bore for dangerous game. We constantly hear arguments as to which is the best calibre for large animals. My experience is that there is no rule for this, and that it depends upon the strength of the man. My advice would be to use as large a calibre as you can manage comfortably, without suffering too much from the recoil; but never to decrease your charge of powder in order to use a larger bore. At big game I would never use a No. 12 with less than five drachms of powder, or six at the least for a No. 10. I cannot myself manage a No. 10, although tolerably strong, and therefore always use 12-bores, which I believe to be the most useful handy size for an ordinary man. With these I have killed elephants, bears, bisons, and all sorts of large game in different parts of the world; but without any question the larger the bore, provided there is an equivalent charge of powder, the more likely are you to stop the rush of a dangerous animal. I shall always remember with respect the marvellous effect produced in our elephant-hunting excursions in Ceylon by the ponderous weapons which my brother, Sir S. Baker, generally used; but not one man in a thousand could have managed them. I shall not easily forget the result when, in a desperate chase, a gun-bearer by mistake handed me his spare rifle instead of mine, and when I fired both the elephant and myself were prostrated at the same moment!

We had the greatest trouble to get the buck down the rocky hill to a spot to which the ponies could come. At last we succeeded; and, strapping it on to Cremorne, trudged down the mountain in the direction of

our new camp. C——, not finding a good camping-ground, had gone on farther than we expected. Captain and Mrs. Pearson had promised to pay us a visit, and soon after our arrival they appeared, having ridden from Teheran that day—a very long ride for a lady. It was a very pretty camp, a small stream running in front, almost too small to fish but full of trout, though not of any size. That night we had fresh trout and moufflon steaks for dinner; and until you have tasted trout fresh from the streams in the Persian mountains, you do not know this fish. Talk of Loch Leven! Its trout are not to be named in the same breath with those of Shiristanik and the Lar.

We determined to devote the next day to fishing on the Dooab river; so we started early in the morning with Captain and Mrs. Pearson, and after a ride of about eight miles reached the main river, a beautiful stream; the trout, however, were not in a rising mood. We had but little sport therefore; but it was a very pleasant picnic, for the scenery was most lovely. During our absence the camp was moved to some higher ground, four miles nearer to our first camp on the mountain, as Captain and Mrs. Pearson were going back the next day, and it would make their ride easier. Poor C—— was still very unwell and not improving. Starting early the next day, we rode back with our friends to the site of our first mountain camp, where we breakfasted. We found that this was the best ground for shooting, and that the height of the mountains and the distances were so great that it was impossible to combine shooting with fishing.

We had an unsuccessful stalk after moufflon before the Pearsons left; and afterwards G—— and I started in different directions, agreeing to make our way back to the tent on the lower ground independently. I had a bad day,

and shot nothing; and, to make matters worse, discovered that Cremorne had thrown a shoe; so, as no one was with me, I made my way homewards until I reached a neck of the mountains, from which the tent was visible, lying about a couple of thousand feet right below me. There was a little narrow zigzag path which led down the nearly perpendicular side of the mountain, and, as it was so narrow that it was awkward to lead the pony, I let him go and drove him before me. We had descended nearly half way, and had come to a part where the mountain was a little less steep, when to my horror Cremorne suddenly left the zigzag and walked like a goat along the almost precipitous side of the hill. I thought every minute that he must roll to the bottom, but he scrambled on for about ten yards, and then stood quietly munching some herbs that grew from the rocks.

At first I was under the impression that where the pony could go a man could certainly follow; but I was quickly undeceived, for, on attempting it, I had the narrowest escape of making a sudden descent. I tried again, but, although I lay flat against the side of the rock, and clung to any little projection, it was perfectly hopeless. Yet there stood provoking Cremorne within thirty feet of me, looking as calm and unconcerned as if he were upon a dead level. I tried coaxing, but it was useless; Cremorne looked at me stolidly, but moved not. The situation was so absurd, and I was so helpless, that I burst out laughing. There was no chance of the pony's moving farther on, for it became a perfect precipice. I now examined the ground below, and found that, about ten yards beneath the point where he was standing, there was a little ledge along which I could just crawl on all fours. So, as a last resource, I went up the zigzag until quite above

him, and then pelted him with small stones. Disliking such treatment, he at last scrambled down until he got on to the ledge. Having accomplished this, I with great difficulty made my way to him and brought back the truant. There never was such a pony for making his way over bad ground. Lest he should repeat the operation, I had to ride him down the mountain all the rest of the way.

C—— was not so well, and, although I would not yet tell him so, I began to fear that his health would never stand all the trying ordeals which I knew we had before us.

The next day G—— and I started with the small tent for the higher ground, as we found it such hard work to climb about 3000 feet every day before reaching our shooting-ground. As we were ascending the mountain, we heard a shot, and on looking with the glasses saw two men who had evidently just killed a moufflon. It turned out to be our old friend the shepherd and his brother, and we engaged them to come with us the next day, and during the whole time we remained on the mountains. It was a bitterly cold night, and we could not keep ourselves warm. It blew so, too, that what with the difficulty of keeping up a fire and the high elevation, it was no easy matter to get boiling water for the jorum of hot grog with which we endeavoured to comfort ourselves. Our camp, be it remembered, was 11,900 feet above the sea.

Early the next morning we heard an outcry amongst the servants, and on rushing out were just in time to see a herd of ibex passing down the ravine within a hundred yards of our tents; but there was no time to run back for the rifles. Soon after daybreak, however, we started off; and my account of this day will show

that sport, like life, has its gloomy and unfortunate as well as its bright and successful features.

We had not proceeded more than a mile from the camp when we suddenly saw the horn-tips of an ibex, over some rising ground, not 400 yards from us. Unfortunately, I had taken out a horsekeeper that day, which was quite unnecessary with Cremorne, and had left him about half a mile down the hill, with strict injunctions not to move from that spot. On seeing the horns I stooped down, and, signing to the shepherd, we crept quietly towards a large rock which stood by itself in a sort of broad gulley, and made an excellent hiding-place. The ibex was feeding towards us, and the wind was just right. We waited patiently, and presently four magnificent buck ibex appeared. I made certain that I should get a perfect shot, when suddenly, a small herd of moufflon showed themselves to our right front, also moving slowly towards us. This was annoying, as it was evident I should have to fire at those that came up first, and I wanted the ibex. Both herds, however, came feeding on at the same distance, and they had got within about 260 yards when, suddenly, the leading ibex raised his head in evident alarm. I was utterly puzzled, for I had never moved and he was not looking in my direction; but I saw there was not a moment to be lost, and, judging the elevation, I fired, and heard the satisfactory thud of the ball which told that the buck was hit; yet he dashed off with the others. On looking back to see what had given the alarm, I perceived the horsekeeper coming along with Cremorne, and singing. This was too much! Instead of running after the buck, I made a dash at the horsekeeper. I suppose my aspect showed anger, for he turned, and bolted as hard as he could go. The

shepherd had gone to look after the buck, and on running up I saw it lagging far behind the others, but getting over the rocky ground much faster than we could follow. It had been hit too low. I had judged the distance at two hundred yards, but on stepping it found that it was two hundred and sixty. The shepherd, who was as nimble as a goat, declared that the wounded buck could not go far, and dashed down after him.

It was curious how soon one missed wounded deer on this ground. Running fast was impossible, as the sides of the mountains were nothing but small pieces of rock piled on each other, which gave way and rolled over at every step. At last, giving up the search as useless after a long pursuit, we returned to the high ground and began to make our way to the extreme peak of Elburz. There was a little projecting rock which commanded a considerable extent of country, and I was just pulling out my glass to spy, when right below me, only about 600 yards off, stood three ibex. Such animals! One old buck was simply magnificent; never had I seen anything like him! His companions were large, but he was twice their size, and with his long black hair and splendid cimeter-shaped horns, he looked a thorough monarch of the glen. I crouched and lay quite still, watching him with eager eyes. It was hopeless to try to stalk him from where we stood, for we should be exposed all the way, and the wind would be wrong directly we got lower down the hill. But to my delight, he began pawing among the stones, which is the usual preface to lying down in the heat of the day. Only twenty yards from where he was pawing, there stood a small rock, and to this it was evident at a glance, from the nature of the ground, that we could

make our way unseen and with the wind in the right direction. As there would be plenty of time, we lay still and waited patiently. Presently down he lay, and soon afterwards the others followed suit. Fortunately, the big buck was lying nearest to the rock. I never met with a more perfect chance of success. We now crept quietly back, and began to make a circuit on the other side of the hill. About half a mile below stood Cremorne and the horsekeeper; but suddenly, to my horror, the old shepherd bawled out to the latter not to follow us. It was too late to stop him, and he declared the ibex would not hear; but on returning I saw the old buck and his companions tearing down the hill in a state of frantic alarm. This was trial number two, and rather hard for one day.

We now noticed some eagles soaring ominously over a certain spot about two miles distant, and my guide declared that the wounded buck was dead. However, as it involved a descent of about 2000 feet, I thought I would let him go down and explore, instructing him to meet me again on the top of Elburz. I saw G—— standing close to Cremorne, and went down to speak to him. Whilst we were talking, a herd of moufflon, disturbed from the mountains, galloped over the open ground not very far from us. I jumped on to Cremorne, and, riding as fast as possible down a gulley where I thought there might be a chance of cutting them off, just got a long shot—about 250 yards—as they ran past. The buck I fired at gave a bound, but I was not quite sure at the time whether I had hit it, until following on I came upon the blood track; but there was no chance of getting it. I now rode up to the highest point of Elburz and waited for the shepherd. Soon I heard the little tinkling sound that the moufflon always made

in moving over the loose stones, and saw a very small doe that had evidently been alarmed by the shepherd. Suddenly she stopped, and on looking with my glasses I spied a fine buck ibex lying down. She soon bolted away, but he remained. Leaving Cremorne, I stalked him, but found it would be hopeless to think of getting nearer than 200 yards; so I took the shot at this distance, breaking his leg high up at the shoulder, yet he beat me easily, and though I followed him for an hour it was useless. This was bad luck—three wounded bucks in one day; and I almost made a vow I would take no more long shots. It was distressing to wound the poor beasts in this way. As I was making my way back I flushed three megaloperdrix. They were the first we had seen—magnificent birds, almost the size of a capercailzie. I had to cross a patch of frozen snow about half a mile long and almost 100 yards across; but, although on a slope, I hoped to make my way by sticking my hunting-knife into the snow and using it as a kind of drag. For about twenty yards I got on very well, but then began to go quicker and quicker, notwithstanding all my efforts to check myself, and I had a tremendous fall where the snow ended. With a knife in one hand and a rifle in the other, it was not pleasant. Fortunately the ground was soft and muddy, and I did not hurt the rifle.

On our return to camp we found that C——, experiencing no improvement in health, had determined to return to Teheran. Sorry as I was thus early to lose our genial, good-hearted companion, I was only too delighted that he should again be under proper medical care. I feared that our parting would not be a temporary one, for it was quite evident that his health was shattered, and that to attempt the trying journey that we had before us

in his condition would be madness. We continued to shoot in this neighbourhood, and a few days afterwards heard that Dr. Baker had refused to allow him to think of proceeding, and had ordered him to return to England. It was sad thus to lose one of our party, just as we were starting upon our Expedition.

G—— and I now remodelled our camp to the requirements of two instead of three. G—— bought Macaroni, C——'s excellent pony; I purchased a very useful little iron-grey; and C—— kindly left his rifle with G——.

We shot on these high grounds until the 24th July. I had determined to make our way by the Dooab across the mountains to the Lar river. This course would enable us to see new ground and pass through the hills, instead of returning to Teheran and taking the road thence to the Lar. Our first march was to a lovely spot in the prettiest part of the Dooab; but the fishing was very indifferent. We remained here until the 26th. Along the banks of the Dooab we found, what is not very uncommon in Persia, namely, a good road for some miles, but with no approaches to it at either end. Following this for about six miles from our camping-ground, we then struck off into the mountains to a village called Wellaterood, altogether about fourteen miles. The road was reported good, but the last eight miles of this village-path were abominable. It was a mere track on the sloping side of a mountain, generally not more than about eight inches wide. In some places even this had slipped away, and we had to scramble the ponies along the steep side of the mountain for two or three yards before recovering the track. How the mules with their loads managed, I cannot conceive. Two did come to grief, and fell over into the river below.

We remained at Wellaterood until the 29th, as we heard there was good shooting in the mountains, but found little sport. Ascending one of the highest peaks, from which we had a magnificent view, we were enabled to map out the country, for no one at Teheran had been by this road before. Each day we struck up the mountains to different points, but with poor results. Our camp was in a pretty valley by the side of a bright little stream from which the natives extracted trout, but the fish would not rise to the fly. On returning to camp one evening we heard Gerome having a regular battue. He fired about thirty shots and brought in *one* partridge. The last day, G—— and I went both up and down the sides of mountains which were so precipitous that I have ever since wondered how any ponies could manage to keep their footing. The ascent at last became so steep that they could go no further, and we feared to dismount lest we should roll them down the mountain in doing so. At length, with great care, we succeeded in finding a high bunch of grass that gave a slight foot-hold, and the ponies then scrambled the rest of the way after us. There never were such clever animals in difficult ground.

On the 29th we marched to a village called Loula, about thirty miles off. On the way we passed a broad, well-cultivated valley, and, near a village called Shemsha, came upon a seam of coal cropping up from the ground. Iron-stone was abundant in the same locality, but not very rich apparently. We could see other coal-seams on the sides of the mountains, and were told that small loads are sometimes sent down to Teheran; but there is only a mule-track, and, although coal is abundant, this valley is not worked. Persia is rich in mineral wealth; but the absence of roads is the curse of the country.

The whole traffic is carried on by mules on the mountains, and mules and camels on the plains, no wheeled carriages existing. Thus nothing is developed, and the country is in a state of stagnation.

The next day we marched to the Lar river, about thirty-two miles. We followed the course of the Gargerood for some distance through a fertile valley, and by a far better road than usual; then we ascended a pass of 10,000 feet in height; and afterwards looked down into the valley of the Lar. This pass marked the water-shed from which the Gargerood runs into the plains south of the great mountain range, while the Lar runs into the Caspian to the north. In the valley of the Gargerood there were numerous villages, with much cultivation. In the valley of the Lar there was no cultivation, and only the black tents of the nomads, who migrate there in the summer with their flocks and herds, and seek the lower grounds in the winter. When we reached the Lar valley we found but a small stream, and just below us, in and about it, we came upon an excited group of twenty or thirty men and boys engaged in a curious system of fishing. They had made a dam of stones across the river, and so turned the mass of the main stream into a new channel. The shallow water below, only two or three inches deep, was full of trout, which could just swim, but not without being seen. The men were armed with sticks, and whenever a trout moved they gave chase and knocked it on the head. Each man had some five or six pounds' weight of trout, and the sport caused immense excitement.

I was surprised to find the river so small, but on moving on about a mile we came upon the main stream, issuing out of the rocky side of the mountain. It was a beautiful sight. Clear as crystal, the river came foaming

out of the rock, not through a cavern or channel that it was possible to enter, but bursting forth like a gigantic spring, and dashing into the valley a full-grown river. We trudged along by its side for about ten miles, every minute expecting to reach the camping-ground that had been indicated to us. At last we reached the junction of two streams, which brought a very considerable influx of water, and below lay the Lar fishing-grounds of which we had heard such cheering accounts in Teheran. What a lovely river for fishing it was! Sometimes so deep and rapid and narrow that you could throw a fly across it, at other places so broad that you could barely reach the middle. It was just perfection in every way; running through a broad rocky valley with bare grim peaks on either side, while straight in front, with broad pyramidal base and snowy top, rose Demavend, the great mountain of Persia, 20,000 feet in height. Add to this a magnificent climate, perfectly cool in the great heats of summer, and you have a fisherman's paradise. The temptation was too strong to be resisted; and after selecting a good spot for the tents on a grassy-green plateau, I put up my rod and rushed down to the river, wondering whether this also would prove deceptive, like the Dooab. But, no! At my first throw I had a nice trout; and, when they came to tell me that the tent was all prepared and dinner ready, I had fifty-six as pretty little fish as one could see. Oh! ye epicures, take a trip to Persia; stimulate your appetites by the fresh air of these mountain-tops, and then tell me if ever you ate a fish to compare with a Lar trout that only an hour before was in his native stream.

What pleasant days we passed by the side of that beautiful river! Captain and Mrs. Pearson soon paid us another visit, accompanied by Mr. Ellis, who was

travelling in Persia, and by Mr. Smyth, the Secretary to the Legation. Mrs. Pearson was a most successful fisherwoman, and the time passed so happily that we all grew quite sad when they were obliged to return to Teheran and wish us a final good-bye. But human nature is never satisfied. The trout seldom ran more than about a pound, and we had hopes that by descending the river we might find larger fish; so, when our friends had gone, we struck our camp and moved about nine miles lower down, right to the foot of Demaveïd. Such a lovely camp I selected! for here another stream came foaming down from the mountains and, joining the Lar under some high over-shadowing rocks, had worn a hollow and created a long pool some ten or twelve feet deep. Then the river dashed on through high rocky cliffs, winding about amongst great boulders and forming pools and rapids dear to the heart of a true angler; whilst above the point of junction there rose a small rocky plateau of about a hundred feet in height, which commanded the whole view, and straight in front stood Demavend, towering up to the skies, yet seen from base to top in all his grandeur. And our small camp, when pitched upon the plateau, added another pretty feature. How striking was the view as we returned of an evening from our fishing! The sun just setting in the west and throwing brilliant hues over the cold, rugged peaks,—the lovely river winding about and dashing over the rocks, with the white tents suddenly appearing on their picturesque site,—formed a scene never to be forgotten. This is one of the most pleasant remembrances of Persia. How few there are!

I had my rod with me, and in five minutes was at the deep pool. At the first throw, out darted a fish of about a pound and a half, and I had him on. I always

CAMP ON THE RIVER LAR — WITH A VIEW OF DEMAVEND

fished with a light trout-rod and fine tackle, and these plucky Lar fish, in perfect condition, would give some trouble before they found their way into the landing-net. In three throws I had three more fish of nearly equal size, but then they grew more wary; so I left the water alone for a time. I believe that pool was bewitched, for every day I used to try it and always get one fish, after which the next I hooked invariably got away.

By the time the tent was pitched, in rode a mounted man with a letter from Teheran; and, as we wanted some supplies, we sent in a mule with return letters and a dozen of trout, all over a pound and some nearly two. We afterwards heard that they were delivered at the Legation (fifty miles) in time for breakfast the next morning. How we did fish! The trout ran much larger than they were higher up the stream, though not often above two pounds. I had been told to bring very small flies out to Persia, but this was a great mistake. Here I used to fish with sea-trout flies, and with much better results, for I hooked more fish, lost fewer, and was not bothered with the small fry. A brown fly, with rather bright tail and body, was generally the most killing. We used to fish from early morning until about eleven o'clock; then the trout would rarely rise much until three, when we sallied out again and fished until dark. After dark I never rose a fish, although I tried constantly. I will not weary my reader with each day's sport during the time we remained at this beautiful camp, but will only give a general description. I used to be accompanied by Abbas, a tent-pitcher with sporting propensities, whom, however, I never could get to use a landing-net. Abbas's impression seemed to be that he ought to hit at the trout with it, and many a nice fish has he knocked off for me; but his intentions were excellent.

We sallied out soon after daybreak, and first fished the pool with the result already described. Then for a quarter of a mile the river was very rapid, and I only picked up a fish or two here and there; but a pound trout would whisk out twenty yards of line before you could get a pull at him. Then a little lower down there was a charming spot, and by jumping from boulder to boulder you found yourself in the middle of the river, with the water rushing down all around you. Just in the eddies of those boulders many a nice trout would lie; and, when you did get a big one, it was no child's play, for he was out in the strength of the stream in a moment, and your winch whistled away without ceasing until he found himself in the slacker water some thirty yards below; and then to get him up again against that stream wanted delicate handling.

Below this was a deep dark pool, but with a sandy sort of bank shelving down to it. Here there was scarcely any stream, but from that hole one evening I pulled out more trout than I could have believed it possible to catch at one spot. For about twenty minutes the trout seemed to be possessed, and at every throw I had two or three on. I did not attempt to play them, but, gradually dropping the point of the rod and running away from the water, towed them up the shelving sand; and it is wonderful what large fish you may land in this way with light tackle. But then you must have the shelving bank. Three times I landed all three fish, and I cannot remember how often I got two.

Below this, again, was a charming pool, which would have been just the place for a salmon had there been salmon so high up the river. Here I usually had to wade, but always got some large trout. A little lower down, about a mile and a half from our camp, the river

ran in a dark deep channel, not twenty feet broad, between two sheer precipitous rocks, and here I always had to retrace my steps, for there was no way of passing. Curious, however, to know what was beyond, I one day scrambled up the mountain, and at length espied a deep valley, through which the river ran for about half a mile before passing out through a similar place. But into this valley there was no path. Not even the nomad shepherds with their mixed flocks of goats and sheep appeared to make their way into it. By dint of reconnoitring I at last discovered a passage, and with some difficulty descended. The river, after issuing from the cleft in the rocks, widened out into a broad pool, and then divided into two channels for a couple of hundred yards; and just where these joined again there seemed a likely spot.

At my first throw, up rose a fish of about three pounds; but he was lightly hooked and was off in a moment; and after that, although at every throw great big fellows, running two, three, and four pounds, would come up and have a look at the fly, they would not really take it. At last, in despair, I moved some way lower down; here I rose a good four-pound fish, and he was not pricked, so I waited a minute or two and threw over him again. In an instant I had him on; but at that moment, to my vexation, a fish of about two pounds took the tail fly, and my four-pounder soon got off, while I only landed the smaller one. There was a weird look and feeling about this valley. One felt that no European foot had ever before trodden it; but the trout ran so much larger than in any other part of the whole river Lar that I christened it the Happy Valley. A little lower down there was a shelving shore. I was alone, and had to wade to get to the next part of the stream. Here I got

several moderate-sized fish, but finally hooked one of nearly three pounds; and after a really good fight had him lying upon the grass.

Every morning I caught from fifty to sixty fish, and generally about the same number in the afternoon. Our whole camp lived on trout, and we had to devise many different ways of cooking them, by way of variety. Boiled trout, fried trout, curried trout, pickled trout, stewed trout, were all tried in turn, until at last I hit upon an excellent dish—trout pie.

Try it, good reader.

Put a beefsteak at the bottom of the pie-dish (we could only get mutton). Above this place your trout, unboned, but with the heads and tails cut off. Add quantities of hard-boiled eggs, pepper and salt, and other condiments; then fill up with some strong stock; put a paste over and bake slowly (our oven was primitive); and you will have a dish fit for a king, and far superior to those four-and-twenty blackbirds recorded in the history of our younger days.

But all my readers are not fishermen, so I must e'en put up my rod, and, leaving this lovely spot, push forward again on our long and weary journey.

CHAPTER VI.

Ab-i-Aske—Ab-i-Gurm—Khaloe—Shahzadeh—Amol—Barfrush—Skirgau.

On the 12th August we moved from Lar junction. I intended to follow the course of the river for a considerable distance, as it seemed but little known, and then to cross the mountains by Foulad Meihala to Sharood. We should thus be slowly getting on our way, at the same time mapping out a little-known country, and avoiding the heat of the plains. I was also anxious to learn if there were salmon in the Lar lower down, as I had heard it reported. We knew that about sixteen miles down the Lar there was a bridge, and as our muleteer, Meshidi Hassan, had gone to Teheran on business, it was arranged that he was to meet us at that spot. We were in hopes that the rule in fishing hitherto, viz., that the trout ran larger as we descended the river, would hold good; but we did not find this to be the case on arriving at Lar Bridge, for although we caught plenty of fish we found none above a pound.

We waited for Meshidi Hassan until the 16th, and then marched on seventeen miles to the hot springs Ab-i-Gurm, on the slopes of Demavend. After riding about ten miles we came to some curious sulphur springs, Ab-i-Aske, which have a great reputation with the

Persians for their efficacy in cutaneous diseases. A regular town has grown up around them, full of Persian lodging-houses; it is, in fact, a regular Persian watering-place. We had to ascend about 2000 feet between this place and Ab-i-Gurm. The hot spring here was very remarkable. It issued from the rock in a rapid stream through a stone channel that had been made for it, about three feet wide; it was so hot that you could only just dip your finger into it for an instant without its being scalded. The effect of this water upon the skin is supposed to be very great. The stream runs through a filthy dirty channel into a small pond full of black mud, and to this pond come people from all parts of Persia who are afflicted with cutaneous diseases. A part of the stream is diverted through a small bath; but the black muddy pond appeared to be the favourite resort.

I had intended to march the next day, but in the evening Shaab headed a deputation from all our followers, begging that we would halt a day in order that they might have a thorough bath and make other preparations for their journey; to which petition, as the men had behaved well, I agreed. And now that we have regularly started on our route, let me give a description of our party.

First there came Gerome. As Gerome and Shaab rather clashed, and as it was absolutely necessary, from his knowledge of Persian and of the people, that Shaab should be head servant for the present, Gerome always took charge of the transport department, while Shaab was responsible for supplies. Shaab was my personal servant; Zenil Abdeen was G——'s. Then there was Abdoollah the cook, and Aboo Cassim, his assistant, who looked after plates, knives, forks, and utensils; then Said Mati and Abbas, the two tent-pitchers, and three horse-

keepers. Meshidi Hassan, a most cheery little muleteer, owned our nineteen mules, and had four assistants under him; so that our whole party mustered seventeen people. Shaab was mounted on a very good Arab of his own, and looked a much greater swell than his master, and Gerome rode one of the spare ponies.

At Ab-i-Gurm I tried using some of the hot water for my bath, and it certainly produced a most pleasant effect upon the skin; but it was so strongly impregnated with sulphur as to be quite undrinkable. In wandering about, I discovered, at about half a mile distance from the site of the present spring, the very extensive remains of baths, evidently of great antiquity; and curious small pieces of old pottery, quite unlike any now to be found in Persia, were lying about in immense quantities; but the fragments were rather minute. I collected some of the larger specimens. This bathing establishment had evidently been on a grand scale, and had occupied a considerable plateau on the side of the mountain. There must in those days have been an outlet stream from the mountain at this spot, for the present stream is lower down. These remains are very curious, and well worth the attention of the antiquary.

On leaving Ab-i-Gurm, a little event occurred that had rather a material effect upon our after-movements. A mule was sick, and Abbas, one of the farashes,* went into the village to try to hire another. He was set upon by a retired sergeant of the Persian army and some of his friends, and was severely beaten and cut. We did not know of this occurrence until the end of the day's march; but, as it would have created a very bad effect if it had been allowed to go unpunished, I determined to follow the river right down to Amol

* Tent-pitchers.

in the low country of Mazanderan, and there to lay the case before the Governor. During this day's march we kept constantly descending, always following the banks of the Lar. The first twelve miles were through a fine fertile valley; then the river suddenly ran through a precipitous rocky pass. The road was difficult, and eventually we crossed by a most insecure bridge. We found the remains of two other bridges near the same spot, both of which had been washed away by the roaring torrent, for the stream was very much contracted and the descent rapid. After getting through this pass, which was wild and grand, the valley became utterly barren and sterile, and very narrow. By the side of the path, there were in different places an extraordinary number of little caves artificially cut into the rock. These, we were told, had been made long ago as shelters for the muleteers and caravans which followed this route in olden days, when it was a more important line of communication between Teheran and Mazanderan.

After having journeyed about twenty-five miles, we came suddenly upon a perfect little oasis in this desert, though it covered only about twenty acres. There were trees and a rich sort of garden; and we halted here for some little time, the roads having been so bad that the mules had fallen far behind. After pushing on about five miles further, we found that we had been misled, and that this fertile spot was Khaloe, where we had intended to pitch our camp. So we halted at once in a most barren-looking glen, where a considerable stream joined the Lar. Here some people we met declared that salmon were taken in the wet season. I put up my rod and tried my most tempting flies, but never got the sign of a rise. The mules did not come up until

long after dark, and it was past ten o'clock before we got anything to eat. The camp, however, had settled down, and large fires were lighted and kept up with a little prickly shrub, the usual thorn which is found in such profusion in Northern Persia, and nearly all desert countries. When dry in summer, it burns with great brightness, and forms the common fuel of the country.*

The next day, still following the river, we marched about twenty-two miles to Shahzadeh. Towards the latter part of this day's journey the country improved; trees began to appear occasionally; and the river had very much increased in bulk, and was now the perfection of a salmon river in appearance; the whole scenery, in short, resembling parts of Norway. Near Shahzadeh we noticed a peculiar feature of the great mountain range which runs from west to east along the whole of Northern Persia. These mountains are densely clothed with forest from their base to 3000 or 4000 feet on the northern face; but there is no wood on the southern side. On first approaching the wooded country from the mountains the peculiarity is very curious; for even the small detached hills have no wood on their southern sides, though thickly clothed on the northern. Thus, when we looked back at hills which had appeared barren as we approached, we saw them all covered with high forest.

Within a few miles of Shahzadeh we came upon an excellent piece of road, which I was in hopes would extend to Amol; but, as usual, after running for four or five miles it again subsided into a track. We now entered a dense forest, something like that through

* Probably this shrub, so valuable in the desert, is alluded to in the 8th verse of the 58th Psalm: "Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns; so let indignation vex him even as a thing that is raw."

which we had passed on our road from Sari to Teheran, comprising magnificent trees of oak, teak, and walnut; and a stream ran close by that would have turned any number of saw mills, and then carried the timber down into the Caspian. But who ever expects to see a sign of progress in Persia? Nature runs to waste, and Man does nothing.

As we neared the foot of the mountains, we could distinctly perceive the sea in the distance; and, following the road for about eight miles after leaving the hills, we arrived at Amol, a wretched-looking town. We halted on the outskirts, sending Shaab to apprise the Governor of our approach; and he soon sent word that a house would be prepared for us. The place was almost deserted. Most of the inhabitants go to the mountains in the summer to avoid the great heat and the terrible fevers which ravage Mazanderan at this season of the year. We were taken to a very good house, whose owner was away. The place was choked with rank vegetation and high grass, but, when the mules arrived, they revelled in it and soon reduced its height. I now made inquiries with regard to the salmon, and was assured again that they *did* come up the river in the wet season. But the river here has the usual peculiarity of Persian rivers, that it gets smaller instead of larger as it runs on; so many watercourses being cut for irrigation that the main bulk disappears. At this point the beautiful Lar had become an insignificant stream.

We were assured that they caught numbers of salmon in their nets. I asked to see the nets; but they could produce only small casting-nets, declaring that the big ones were in a village some ten miles away. Whether this was the truth or not, it is difficult to say. As a

rule, you may assume that anything you are told in Persia, and do not yourself see, is untrue. The Persian finds an innate pleasure in lying that is difficult to understand; and he has not the slightest shame at being found out. So my salmon inquiries had no definite result, though I thoroughly believe that salmon do exist. They are found in nearly all the large streams running into the Caspian from the Caucasus; still I have my doubts whether it is not the sea trout rather than the true salmon. We never saw one over twelve pounds, although I was assured that they were caught of fifteen and eighteen pounds; and the fish more resemble the sea trout, the flesh being less pink than that of the real salmon.

We did not get away from Amol until rather late on the morning of the 21st August. There was considerable difficulty in finding a guide—a circumstance which, from the after events of the day, was not without its meaning. Our column had been in the habit of marching in two bodies. As we travelled much faster than the train of mules, G—— and I, Shaab, the cook, and Aboo Cassim, usually marched first, and after going from twelve to fifteen miles halted for breakfast. Whilst we were at breakfast the mules generally came up and passed us, and we then easily repassed them before arriving at our halting-place for the night.

We had adopted the same course on this morning, and after leaving Amol pushed on with the guide through a low and very marshy country, covered in places with high reeds, and intersected with boggy streams. We had not marched far when our guide showed a strong disinclination to go on with us; but we should have been utterly lost without him, as there were numberless cattle tracks which might be mistaken for the

main road, which was only a small footpath. We told him that he had agreed to come and received his money, and that he must stick to his bargain. The country was very flat, with very few trees. After going about fourteen miles, however, we came to a large tree standing by itself, and the ground here being drier than the surrounding marsh we halted for breakfast. We had nearly finished, when suddenly my horsekeeper galloped in with an alarming report. His story, too, was circumstantial. He had been with Gerome and the mules, and they had gone about three miles from Amol, when a large body of robbers, upwards of a hundred, he said, had suddenly stopped and surrounded them. Gerome had told him to gallop on to us, and he had ridden through them and followed on our tracks. They were beating the muleteers to death when he left, and pillaging the baggage.

This was indeed serious intelligence; for with the mules, besides all our effects and all our money, were the spare fire-arms and ammunition. Of course G——, Shaab, and I were all armed both with guns and revolvers, and, jumping on to the ponies and taking the horsekeeper to show us the spot, we rode back at a rapid pace. On nearing the scene of action, a number of men were seen armed with knives, spears, and sticks; but they cleared the road as we galloped up. Then we came upon the big Indian tent tossed into a large muddy pool. A little further on lay some of the baggage, thrown about in utter confusion, and two muleteers were lying groaning and apparently *in extremis*. Close by we found Gerome and the other servants ensconced amongst the remainder of the baggage. Gerome gave a hurried account of the attack. He was riding, as usual, in rear of the mules, when there was a stoppage in front. On

riding forward, he was set upon by a large party of men, who also commenced throwing down the mule-loads and pillaging. He immediately sent off the horsekeeper to me, and fired over the heads of the robbers, who thereupon fell back into the high grass, but completely surrounded him and his party. He had formed a sort of breast-work of the baggage, and established himself there with the rest of his servants, firing whenever the attacking party attempted to advance.

A glance round showed the position of affairs. The scene of operations was a low marshy flat, intersected by watercourses, and covered with long grass or rice cultivation, and there were a number of high fences round the rice-fields to keep out the wild boar. Blocking the road to Amol stood a party of about twenty men; and in the high grass, and about 200 yards distant, stood the main body. Other small detached parties were lying about, completely surrounding Gerome and his associates; but those on the road by which we had returned had opened out and let us through. It might evidently be necessary to open communications with Amol; so trusting to the effect of a sudden initiative, and calling to Shaab and Gerome to follow, we dashed straight at the party blocking the Amol road. No sooner did these men find that we were going to attack than they broke in all directions, running for their lives over the deepest bogs, and clambering over the fences of the rice-fields. Judging by the effect thus produced, we now turned towards the main body, and went at them full gallop; but these stood firm, and, after we had gone about a hundred yards, we found ourselves suddenly brought up by a deep boggy watercourse about twenty feet wide, where we were immediately jeered at by the robbers, who evidently knew the safety of their position. But in

another instant I spied a place where some adventurous cow had scrambled into the ditch, and from the footprints had got safely up the other bank. Where a cow could go our ponies could go; so in I went with a desperate flounder, and with a struggle emerged on the other bank. G——, Shaab, and Gerome followed, and, directly our little party had passed the obstacle, we went straight at the body of robbers in our front. There was no jeering now. About half-a-dozen timid spirits turned and ran; then a tremor seemed to go through the ranks of the remainder, and in another moment the whole body was scattered and flying over the fields in all directions. It was obviously important to take some prisoners; but this was not to be easily done. The country was almost impassable for horses, and the fugitives naturally knew the ground, which we did not. Still on we went, blundering into blind ditches, and scrambling through marshy bogs. Every other minute the ponies were on their heads, and Shaab and Gerome were tailing-off rapidly.

I had marked out some of the ringleaders, and never lost sight of them; and with all our mishaps we were steadily gaining upon them, when a high fence appeared in front, over which they scrambled like monkeys. I pulled my little grey together, but he had not the slightest idea of jumping; so, dismounting, I gave the fence a good Leicestershire swing backwards and forwards for two or three times, and thus brought half-a-dozen yards of it down with a crash. Meanwhile the ringleaders had been going like greyhounds, and were well ahead again. One man, dressed in blue, who had been very prominent, was beginning to slacken a little, and no wonder, for we had come a mile and a half already at best pace. Before him lay a large deep rice-field, and

A SKIRMISH WITH ROBBERS IN MAZANDERAN.

beyond that a friendly village; once there, he would be safe. I saw this would be our only chance; so calling to G—— to take the higher ground, which looked sounder, I took the little grey tight by the head and drove him along through the deep mud, as fast as he could go. The man saw I was gaining rapidly, and made a last spurt; but it was no use. He was within a hundred yards of the village when I passed him, and in another minute the muzzle of a gun was at his head and he was a prisoner. And a most troublesome prisoner he proved, for, although at one moment he would beg for mercy, the next instant he would be shouting to his comrades who had reached the village to come to his rescue, and he positively refused to move when we urged him to do so. Pointing the gun at him was of no use. He seemed to know perfectly well that I should not shoot him. We tried to tie his hands, but this he would not allow; and we felt ridiculously powerless, for I did not want to hurt him.

There was no help for it. The only way was to get rid of one's arms and meet him on equal terms. He was a powerful muscular man; so, as I was bigger than G——, I gave him my gun and pistol, and then closed with our captive; and it was not without a severe struggle that I threw him and secured his hands with my handkerchief. Even then he would not move. But I got G——'s head rope, and fastening it between the man's arms, and then attaching it to his pony's girth, we towed him ignominiously back. Shaab and Gerome had taken another prisoner, and a third was discovered hiding in the high grass. These men now confessed the whole plot.

It appeared that Abbas's assailant at Ab-i-Gurm was a man named Jedoollah, a retired Persian sergeant. This man and his friend had made their way to Amol,

and there concocted a plan for robbing us. Jedoollah belonged to this neighbourhood, and, by painting the rich plunder and large sums of money that might be obtained, had no difficulty in getting a number of villagers to join him. The attack had only been frustrated by Gerome's cool pluck and judgment in at once sending on to us, and by the timidity of the villagers in not closing upon him before we arrived. Very little had been lost, the principal sufferer being Meshedi Hassan, the chief muleteer, whose saddle-bags had been emptied of their contents, including twenty-five tomauns. The two muleteers, though badly hurt, were not seriously injured, and the mules, which had been scattered in all directions, were soon recovered. The large Indian tent had been nearly destroyed, but fortunately the would-be robbers had never got hold of the four spare guns and the ammunition, which Gerome had carefully guarded; nor had they found our money-bags. It took a long time to repair damages and reload the mules. Night came on before half the way to Barfrush had been traversed, and the camp had to be formed in a feverish, jungly swamp. Military precautions were taken, and Shaab with five men was placed in charge of the prisoners. But in the early morning there was a sudden alarm. Shaab had gone to sleep; the guard had followed suit; and the prisoners were off. Abbas came and spoke to me reproachfully; in fact, it was a little my fault. The evening before, he had secured the captives with ropes. Hearing some groaning, I went out and found that he had tied them so tightly that it would be positive torture for men to remain thus bound all night; and I ordered the cords to be slackened and the prisoners carefully watched. The result was that they were all off. How is it that no men of Eastern race ever make efficient sentries? Had I an

Asiatic army as an enemy, I would always attack an hour before daybreak. Their sentries would be certain to be asleep, and the men unprepared.

August 22nd.—We marched off rather crestfallen at the escape of our prisoners, and I own I was a little relieved when daylight broke, for we were in a hazardous position, and a determined attack upon our camp would have been serious. It is true that we should probably have beaten off any attempt that was likely to be made upon us; but it would have occasioned considerable bloodshed, and left a bad impression in connection with the name of Englishmen. Moreover, in a country like Persia, where there is a constant jealousy between English and Russians, it would have been made use of for political purposes. I was, therefore, most anxious to avoid anything like a rencontre with the natives, and thought that we had been most fortunate, considering the serious nature of the previous day's skirmish, in avoiding graver consequences.

We found that we were quite sixteen miles from Barfrush, and, as we marched in one body with military precautions, our progress was slow. On reaching Barfrush, I sent Shaab on to the Governor to report the circumstances of the attack upon our baggage on the previous day, whilst we halted for breakfast. The Governor was absent, but his little son soon appeared with a large retinue. We explained the whole case, and received a promise that it should be inquired into. Just after the encounter we had met an old man on his road to Teheran. He had been in Bombay, and had known many Englishmen, and was highly amused at the way in which the attack had been beaten off. As we wanted to send letters to Teheran, he came with us for this day's march, and afterwards took charge of them.

When the onslaught was made, the man in charge of

the mule from Ab-i-Gurm had bolted, thus proving his complicity with the intended robbers; but his mule had stuck to the others. We handed it over to the officials at Barfrush, and took a receipt. A large river runs past the town,—a deep, sluggish stream of about 100 yards in breadth; altogether the most important river that runs into the Caspian in this part of Mazanderan, for the Lar is almost absorbed in irrigation. There is a solid brick bridge across it, and it courses about two miles west of Barfrush.

After breakfast we continued our march, and did not reach the camping-ground until dark, having accomplished nearly thirty miles. The mules came along splendidly. There was one beautiful old grey mule that carried the wet tent. The weight of it was enormous, for it took eight men to get it on to her back; yet she did the distance wonderfully, not lagging a yard behind the others. All our people were in high glee, and thought themselves heroes for their conduct the day before. We made them presents of tea. The troublesome event had evidently given them great confidence in us, and everyone was on his best behaviour.

The march from Barfrush was through a very rich and well-cultivated country. It had not the marshy character of the district around Amol, and it was well timbered. Splendid walnut-trees were growing in profusion, and very fine oaks (not exactly like the English oak), and quantities of sugar-canes near the villages. We knew that our next march would take us to Skirgau, which we had passed on our previous journey; and we had not gone above ten miles when we found ourselves on the old road from Sari to Skirgau. Just before reaching this road we passed a pretty village embedded in plane-trees. Suddenly a young woman rushed out of a house, crying bitterly, and beating her breast—that sign

of Eastern woe—as she "lifted up her voice and wept." I inquired as to the cause of her sorrow, and found that her brother had that moment died. It was very touching to see the poor thing's wild grief; but our men looked on with a cold smile upon their faces. They are a heartless set, these Persians! It was quite cheering to get on the old road again; but it brought back sad thoughts of the friend whom we had hoped to have with us, and who was now on his way homewards.

We did not halt at Skirgau, but pushed on to a charming camping-ground, about a mile and a half beyond, which I remembered seeing on our former journey. It was a lovely spot, a grassy plateau of about twenty acres, looking down upon the rapid river below, with the most beautiful jungle and forest on the other three sides; the high mountains towering in the distance, and the vast rich plains of Mazanderan extending far away to the north. Here I halted for a day, to heal the wounds of our muleteers, to dry the tent, which we could not use in its wet state, and generally to repair the damages that had been done in the encounter. It looked a most likely place for sport; but, although this is the characteristic of the greater part of the low hill-country of Mazanderan, I was surprised to see that we met with few signs of game. The absence of bird life was quite remarkable. The people declared that there were tigers, and, although from the number of red-deer horns that we found about in the villages, it was certain that these animals also exist, it was curious how seldom we saw their tracks, and only on two occasions during my travels in Persia did I come across those of a tiger. Wild boar were present in immense numbers, but they always retired to the jungles in the day-time. Some of these jungles in the neighbourhood

of Skirgau are very open; but it is rather hopeless work attempting to stalk red-deer in open forest, for they are certain to hear you, or scent you, before you can see them; and we saw nothing but wild boar.

Towards evening I came upon a hut in the jungle with a little reclaimed land lying round it. Its owners were evidently known to my *shikarree*, or guide, and they did the honours of their establishment in their little way with great grace and hospitality. The women in this part of Mazanderan had no compunction in showing themselves without covering their faces, and even brought us water-melons and walnuts. They were certainly much handsomer than the Persian women generally are, which may perhaps account for the absence of timidity. There was much of what we associate with the gipsy type about the people in this part of Mazanderan, and in many villages they spoke Turkish as well as Persian, showing that there must be a distinction of race.

It now became a question what route we should follow in order to reach Shahrood. I was very much averse to pursuing the road that we had before travelled. It is a sort of duty for a traveller in a little-known country to explore as much as he can; and to follow upon the footsteps of others when so much remains to be explored shows utter apathy and want of enterprise. So I determined to leave this road at Ziraub; and, although no track was known, I made up my mind to run the risk, and endeavour to get from village to village with nothing but a compass to guide us. I reckoned (and justly, as it turned out) that we might find villages and village-paths that would enable us to make our way, though not perhaps by a direct route; and we should thus be mapping out a country that was quite untravelled, and which no European had visited.

CHAPTER VII.

Casaleone—Hazargereeb—Aliabad—Attenné—Surkada—Chesmeh Ali —Soffiabad—Deh Mollah—Damghan.

We knew the power of our ponies and mules in getting over bad ground; and our men were in the height of good humour, and ready to follow us anywhere. We marched through the beautiful forest-path which we had before traversed between Skirgau and Ziraub, and on arriving at the latter place struck up the hills to the left, instead of following the road, and reached by a mere track a village called Casaleone. We had not left the main route for more than two miles, before we came across some beautiful forest with occasional grassy glades. Here we met a native hunter who had been out after red-deer, and who declared that there were plenty. It certainly looked a beautiful country for game; but there was an ominous absence of tracks.

After going about twenty miles from Skirgau, we reached Casaleone—a cluster of villages, with a considerable quantity of cleared open country, surrounded on all sides by mountains clothed with magnificent forest; and here and there, towards the south, we caught glimpses of the high bare peaks of the main range of mountains. It looked altogether so like a good spot for sport that I determined to stay one day and explore, and,

if that reconnaissance proved satisfactory, to remain for a few days and give ourselves up to shooting. Soon after our arrival we went out to try for a shot at wild boar, but without success. I came across an enormous jackal without a tail. We used constantly to hear these beasts in the low countries of Mazanderan; and their sharp, yelping, melancholy cries reminded me of olden days in India and Ceylon. A heavy shower came on while we were out, and we reached home wet through. Passing this day through a most beautiful jungle of box-trees, some of extraordinary size, and as thick as a man's waist, I cut down one very curious young tree, perfectly straight and about twenty feet long, and gave it to my horse-keeper to carry. He was a very lazy fellow, and, as he would never look where he was going, this long box-pole was constantly getting across some trees in the forest path and lifting the poor man bodily off his mule. So I now cut it in two, and fastened a boar-spear to the end of the thinner piece. This made a formidable weapon, and was immediately appropriated by Abbas, who always marched with it in great pride, and on arriving at the camping-ground stuck it into the ground at the door of our tent.

Early the next morning we started with two native *shikarrees* in quest of red-deer. G—— took one road and I another. As they told us there were tigers in considerable numbers in this forest, I took out my double-barrelled No. 12 and the big No. 4 duck-gun, with ball cartridges. We soon got into the most beautiful open forest, but saw very few signs of red-deer and scarcely any fresh tracks. I took care not to let the *shikarree* carry the duck-gun loaded, but unfortunately he did not know this; and after a long weary walk, without seeing anything, my guide suddenly stopped,

raised his gun, and fired. Of course the only result was the click of the lock, and on rushing forwards I saw one of the largest wild boar I ever beheld dashing through the forest. I got a long quick shot with the No. 12, and wounded him desperately; but he got into thick jungle and beat us. G—— met with no better luck than myself. I am quite sure that no sport is to be had in this country except by night-watching or beating. The first is a very stupid proceeding, and the second very uncertain over so large an extent of forest.

The head-man of our village willingly gave us every information. It appeared that one Ibrahim Khan was at the head of the district, and that he lived forty miles away in the direction of Foulad Meihala; that there was a village path through the jungle and over the mountain to a place called Hazargereeb; and that we should there come to an open country with numerous villages until we reached Aliabad (twenty-six miles), where we were advised to camp, as there was a river which, we were told, was the upper part of the Sari river. The head-man gave us a guide, and we marched through lovely forest that ought to have teemed with game. About five miles from Casaleone we came across the tracks of a tiger, not many hours old, but leading into thick jungle. We kept ascending until we had risen 2000 feet, when we rapidly descended for 1500, and came upon a fine valley, in which lay several flourishing villages. As far as we could make out, the name Hazargereeb applied to the district, and not to any one village in particular.

In a small pass in the hills, about three miles from Hazargereeb, we came upon a curious old burnt-brick column, or minaret, evidently a memorial of the brighter

days of Persia. There was a village close by, and, sending for some of the inhabitants, I questioned them relative to it. As usual in Persia, we could get no information. These people seem to take no pride and no interest in their antiquities. Their houses are constructed of mud, even when marble quarries lie beside them, and there seems to be no faith in, and no wish for, anything of a permanent character. All that I could learn about this solitary column was that it was so old that my informant's father did not remember its being built; which seemed to be as distant a date as he was capable of comprehending;—and this is the ancient kingdom of Cyrus! The ruin, which was in fair preservation, was about twenty feet in diameter; and I should imagine it to date back to about the time of Shah Abbas. I cannot imagine for what purpose it was erected, but there is one somewhat similar in the neighbourhood of Subsawar.

After passing this column we entered a very broad, rich valley, with numerous villages and large tracts of cultivated land; in fact, one of the richest and best cultivated districts that I had yet seen in Persia. There was a well-to-do air about the place that was very unusual. We heard immense numbers of quail calling in the fields on either side of the road, but could not walk them up, and we had no dog. At length we reached Aliabad at the end of the valley, just where a nice stream dashed through the hills on its way to the low country. I could not learn that there were any trout in this stream. In fact, with the exception of the Dooab and the Lar and their tributaries, I have not come across trout in any part of Persia. This is curious and inexplicable. I have an idea that there may be trout in the upper part of the Barfrush river, but,

although this is only about ninety miles from Teheran, no one has yet been enterprising enough to explore it.

G—— had been very unlucky with his ponies; one was rather lame, and the other had a sore back. My little grey also was lame; the result of bad shoeing at Amol the day before the attack upon us. The consequence was that we had to hire ponies from village to village. We found an extraordinary dislike on the part of their owners to letting them. Though we paid very highly and gave the men their money beforehand, there was a singular conviction that we should take their ponies altogether. It appears that this is often done by their Persian masters; and, never having seen any Europeans before, they could not believe that they were likely to prove more just and honest. It was in vain that they saw us give presents to the men whose ponies we had hired, and send them back. Promises were always made, yet on starting in the morning the ponies were not forthcoming, and a long delay invariably ensued before we could get them. However, the head-man of Aliabad was profuse in these promises, and assured us that the ponies should be in camp before daybreak. But, when morning came, only one appeared with his owner, a Dervish, who was to act as guide. He was a very intelligent fellow, and told us that we should get no other animals, as the people had purposely driven them away and the head-man had left the village. Our inquiries proved the statement to be true; so we were obliged to dismount the horsekeepers from the mules: but we had not left this place more than three miles, and commenced the ascent of a pass which led through the mountains, when we met an old man with two ponies coming towards Aliabad. Shaab struck a bargain with him, and he offered not only to hire them

to us, but to accompany us to Surkalla, our next camp. As usual, he received his money in advance. He was a curious old fellow, with a face like a hawk; and when we halted for breakfast I was much pleased with the way in which he made himself generally useful. I had noticed him in earnest conversation with some villagers who passed us whilst at breakfast, going on the same road as ourselves, but attached no importance to this at the time. I now discovered that Cremorne had thrown a shoe, so that altogether our animals were in a very dilapidated condition.

After breakfast we resumed the march. The country was hilly and difficult. A narrow path, by which only one horse could pass, ran along the steep side of a mountain. Sometimes through low jungle, and occasionally amongst boulders of rocks, it wound round every spur of the mountain side, and no distance could be seen in advance. I was leading, followed by Shaab and G——, whilst Gerome rode in rear of all the mules. The path had just opened upon a pretty little level grassy plateau, of about half an acre in extent; in about the centre of which stood a magnificent old oak-tree. At the further end a high bank ran down the mountain side, and the road passed through it by a narrow gap. Just beyond this bank was a rocky ridge which completely commanded the further end of the plateau. I had just emerged from the jungle when I became aware that there were about a dozen men, some armed with guns, and some with spears and sticks, standing round the trunk of the old tree; and my first impression was that they had been beating the country and shooting. But directly they saw me they advanced; and the leader, a great brawny ill-favoured-looking ruffian, came up with a menacing air, and was about to seize my pony's

bridle. My gun was in my hand. In one moment I had cocked it, and the muzzle was within three feet of his head. The party close in front of me seemed quite staggered and paralysed by this prompt action; but in another instant, as if by signal, men rose up all along the bank and from every rock on the ridge, and guns were levelled at me from all directions. It was like a scene from "Der Freischütz." The position was awkward; but I saw it would be difficult for them to fire without killing their own people, and I kept the leader covered, and my finger on the trigger. Shaab and G—— were up directly, and the former immediately asked the meaning of the scene. A hot altercation now commenced; but a Persian parley lasts long, and it was of the utmost importance to gain time for more servants to come up.

"Give back the horses you have taken," said the leader. It was explained that no horses had been taken, that the man had agreed to let his horses as far as our next camp, and that he had received his payment for them. This statement was received with a derisive laugh, and a fresh demand made that the horses should be immediately given up. By this time stalwart Aboo Cassim, Abdullah the cook, two muleteers, and the wounded Abbas, though unarmed, had ranged themselves in line with their masters; and Gerome was pushing up from the rear. Shaab told the people that the horses had been paid for to go as far as the camping-ground, and that they would be given up on arriving there, but not before. On this a general attack was made upon us, the *melée* fortunately being so close that the men lining the bank and rocks were afraid to use their guns. In an instant the two leaders of the mountaineers had their guns wrested from them, and so well did our men behave

that, notwithstanding our inferiority of numbers, the attackers were soon falling back upon their comrades behind the bank, whilst we had got possession of the great oak which gave partial cover from any fire.

But matters were looking serious. They had poured in showers of large stones with good effect. I had been twice hit on the head, but my pith hat saved me. G—— had a severe contusion of the arm; Shaab had been knocked down; and Aboo Cassim and the cook were hurt and cut with knives; and the worst of it was that our assailants seemed to be aware that we did not wish to use our guns, and threatening with them no longer produced any effect. But there was not a sign of flinching on the part of the servants, who stood firmly by their masters. It was quite evident to me that this was not an attempt to rob us, but an attack made under a mistaken impression, probably fomented by religious prejudices. It was the first time that any Europeans had travelled through this part of the country; and being most anxious that the English name should not be associated with violence and bloodshed, except in case of dire necessity, I had given strict orders not to fire without my command; and G—— had seconded my wishes with admirable coolness. But there is a limit to forbearance, and I was determined that they should not stop us. Never halt or retreat in face of an Eastern enemy: it is always fatal. There was a lull, and I told Shaab to commence another parley while the guns and ammunition were quickly served out behind the tree to the best men. In case of necessity, I had already made my plan of attack. There was a rocky knoll to the right unoccupied, and by creeping round this one could completely enfilade the bank and ridge. I determined to leave G——, Shaab, and the rest of our men at the oak-tree, and getting round,

unperceived, with Gerome and another good man, to open a flanking fire upon our assailants if necessary; but I, determined not to proceed to extremities except upon the direst compulsion. So Shaab and I advanced alone straight towards them, and tried to come to terms. Unfortunately Shaab's pony during the *melée* had strayed away and joined our enemies. The following parley now occurred.

"Give back the two ponies," they said, "and the guns you have captured; and we will let you pass."

"The ponies are hired and paid for," I replied. "Clear the road, or in five minutes we will force it. When you have cleared the road and delivered up the pony, your guns shall be returned to you."

"Camp here to-night," they said; "you shall not go on."

"We are Englishmen, and will not be stopped," I returned; "and, if you attempt it, the consequences be on your own heads."

Things looked serious. Fortunately at this juncture two of the servants of Ibrahim Khan, the Governor of the district, rode up. The situation was explained to them, and they endeavoured to act as peacemakers. We now discovered that, while we had been at breakfast, the old man had pretended that his ponies were being taken, and had sent on to raise the country in advance; and hence the attack upon us. Ibrahim's men tried to persuade the mountaineers that the ponies had been paid for; but the old man denied this. "Look in his *cummerbund*," said Shaab. He was searched, and the money found upon him. This was a happy solution of the difficulty. The mountaineers gave the old man a good thrashing, and sent back the pony. I gave them a lecture, through Shaab, upon the impropriety and

danger of stopping Englishmen in this forcible manner, and, on their clearing the road and apologising, restored their guns. The leader, we were happy to find, had not come scathless out of the affray. I determined to take on the old man, who had so nearly caused mischief, as a prisoner, and to send him to Ibrahim Khan to be disposed of. But considerable delay had thus taken place, and it was plain that we could not reach our intended camp at Surkalla that night.

The next village we came to was evidently very hostile, and we had some difficulty in carrying our prisoner with us without using force. A little farther on we came to the more important village of Attenné, and, selecting a defensible site, I resolved to encamp here. I sent for the head-man, explained what had happened, read him our papers ordering all people in authority to support us, and offered to place the prisoner in his charge. I also told him I wanted to send a man to Ibrahim Khan at Foulad Meihala, twenty miles over the mountains, with a report of the occurrence. The old head-man behaved very well, and forwarded my letter. He would not accept the charge of the prisoner, but he put him in irons, and came up and slept in our camp himself. But we could see plainly that there was a very uneasy feeling throughout the country; and to fight our way through these mountains, with a long train of mules, against mountaineers most of whom had guns, would have been impossible. The Dervish who had come as our guide had behaved remarkably well, sticking to us manfully. I had determined, in case of difficulties, to try and fight our way to Foulad Meihala, as we heard a good account of Ibrahim Khan from everyone, and I wanted to keep the Dervish as a guide; so we paid him well, and he agreed to remain. We kept a careful watch all night. In the morning

we noticed another sign of bad import; all the women were leaving the village, and going up the mountain.

Amongst wild tribes this is a certain prelude to an attack. Our ponies all wanted shoeing, and it was impossible that we could march that day. As the morning drew on, several villagers came up in a rather impertinent manner, and wanted us to release the prisoner. This was distinctly refused. I anxiously awaited the answer from Ibrahim Khan, who apparently was much feared and respected. The old head-man was evidently desirous of giving us support; but his people seemed unfriendly. I would not show any distrust, but doctored our men's wounds, and tried to keep everyone in good humour. In the afternoon we were glad to see all the women coming back; but presently there was a great clatter of voices, and about thirty of them, in a state of intense excitement, came up to our camp and boldly demanded the release of the prisoner. Here was a complication. What was to be done? It was evident that no forcible measures could be used in this case, and the ladies were very decided. I had remarked that the wounded Abbas usually seemed to be a favourite with the fair sex, so I selected him as my herald. He was told to explain that the prisoner was a very bad man, who had nearly caused the death of many of their people, and that we were only waiting to hand him over to Ibrahim Khan. After a short time roars of laughter, and a great amount of fun between the ladies and my messenger, plainly told me that he was being successful in his mission; and soon afterwards the formidable deputation retired in good humour. Late in the afternoon a satisfactory letter arrived from Ibrahim Khan, saying that the head-man of the village would be held responsible for the prisoner, and that the villagers who had attacked us should be punished. Accordingly

we handed the old man over to the head-man, and everyone now became very friendly; both ponies were shod, and fresh ones promised for to-morrow. They had become convinced that Englishmen took nothing by violence. Their sick had been doctored; they received handsome payment for what they sold; and none of their prejudices had been violated. Even the women came with uncovered faces to see the "Ingliz," as the little column filed away in the morning.

During our stay here, my reputation for successful doctoring brought me many applicants for relief, and to my surprise even from amongst the women; but as a lady's doctor, if discreet, always preserves inviolable secresy, I shall forbear from divulging either the cases or their treatment.

August 20th.—We marched this day with all military precautions, our most trustworthy men being armed with guns and provided with ammunition. We had been greatly pleased with the behaviour of the servants in the recent affray. It was no joke for people only armed with sticks to fight as they had done, with a number of men armed with guns, who might have fired at any moment had not the *melée* been too close. A mutual confidence had sprung up between us, and we knew that we could thoroughly rely upon them. But I could not help feeling uneasy for our long train of mules on these mountainous paths, with numberless little passes, and places where there was every facility for surprise.

On leaving Attenné (4700 feet), we kept constantly ascending; and after travelling about ten miles the forest suddenly ceased, and we saw nothing but the same bare and barren country before us that we had known so well near Teheran. It was very curious how suddenly one passed from the wooded slopes into this com-

parative desert; and it is equally curious to find that the climate changes entirely within a few miles. In the wooded country everything was so damp that our guns required great care; but, after marching a few miles beyond this boundary-line, you might leave the guns outside the tent at night, and not a speck of rust would be visible in the morning. This proves most conclusively how the destruction of trees will entirely alter a climate. The fact has been so distinctly proved in America as to be beyond question; and it is argued that Persia, in the olden days, must also have been much more wooded, and must therefore have had a different climate, or it could not have supported the millions of population recorded in its past history. But why the northern slopes of Mazanderan should remain forest, and none of the southern slopes of the great range should have any timber, I have never been able to understand.

We halted for breakfast at a little stream on the verge of the forest, as we were told that we should find no water on the road until we got to Surkada, fifteen miles further on. We had been gradually ascending, and soon reached a height of 7000 feet above the sea. We could distinctly trace to the west two different ridges of the great mountain range, and the water-shed between was evidently to the Caspian. We looked over a magnificent tract of country towards Foulad Meihala; high peaks of rock, dense forest, and occasionally open hills and patches of wood. This was the most likely-looking ground for sport that I saw in all Persia, for here there might be a chance of getting red-deer, and driving for them would be easy. We picked up a few partridges near Surkada, and they were tolerably plentiful afterwards throughout our journey. They give little sport, but are useful for the pot. They are nearly always found on the rocky sides of the

hills, and as they invariably run up hill, and do not rise unless they are come upon suddenly, it is very difficult to get a flying-shot, and it becomes mere pot-hunting, as of course you shoot them standing or running as you get the opportunity. We seldom got many, four or five brace being a good bag. They were rather dry, flavourless birds; but there is a very small kind found on the Turkoman frontier, which are much better for the table. Surkada was a deserted-looking village in a desolate barren country, but there was no difficulty in hiring horses.

Marching early in the morning for Cheshmeh Ali, we had an example of the curiously deceptive nature of the Persian atmosphere with regard to apparent distance. Cheshmeh Ali seemed to lie at the foot of a hill some six or seven miles distant, and we could not believe that it was a good seventeen miles' march through a most dreary country. Most part of the way we followed the dry bed of a small river, along the banks of which a few tamarisks were growing; but there was no other sign of vegetation. Cheshmeh Ali is a little oasis in this desert; a most refreshing spot, with a river of deliciously clear water running by it, full of fish, but not trout. Here the Shah has a small country house, but I doubt his ever occupying it. The gardens are pretty, and it is altogether one of the few bright spots that rest upon the memory after travelling through the desert wilds of this inhospitable land. I own it was a great temptation to pitch the tents at this pretty place, but I saw that our road followed the river; and, as we had not done a full day's work, I gave the word to push on. Shaab and the muleteers looked sulky; they always liked to halt at a good village, while we, on the contrary, abominated the smells and filth,

and usually pitched our camp at some little distance. However, I gave the order to move, and we marched down a curious valley with high rocky hills on either side, and the river winding between. In one place the valley became very contracted, and a crag of some 800 feet completely commanded it. On this were the remains of old fortifications, actually built of stone.

The country became desolate and barren again; great rocks of black marble rose in masses, and others with a most curious mixture of colour. We got over thirty miles before I gave the word to halt; and near here we came across a large quarry that had evidently been worked at some ancient date, but for what purpose it was impossible to say. On this day I picked up the first and last fossil that I found during my whole travels in Persia. We knew that we were now approaching the point where we should strike into the main road, between Teheran and Shahrood, near Damghan.

The next day, after marching for about eight miles, we emerged from the pass, and could see Damghan in the distance, with its old minarets.* All the villages we

* Damghan was the chief place of the district of Komus, and, as I have already said, a dependency of Tabaristan, anciently forming part of Mazanderan. This province belonged alternately to Media and Khorassan and the position of Damghan on the extreme frontier of these two countries very often rendered it an object of contention between the petty tyrants amongst whom Persia was so frequently divided. It is not, therefore, surprising that, after so many vicissitudes, Damghan should be the shadow of what it once was. Several succeeding sovereigns repaired its falling edifices, and Shah Abbas the Great rebuilt the city as well as the interior enceinte now existing. This is one parasang in extent, and contained 15,000 houses; a heap of ruins here and there now attesting the fact. At the present time there are only about 300 inhabited houses; large portions of cultivated land and many gardens occupy much of the ground on which houses formerly stood. The troubles that followed after the death of Nadir Shah were the cause which led to the decline of Damghan, and it received its last blow when Prince Abbas Mirza, attracted by the salubrity of its air, and the abundance and fertility of its soil, encamped

came to henceforth were little forts, although no Turkomans have penetrated as far as this for the last twenty years. I asked why they were built in such an uncomfortable manner, and the answer was that their "fathers had always built so." The alteration in circumstances did not seem to be considered of any importance. That day our road over an open plain wound to such an extent that there was a loss of about three miles in twelve; yet no one took the short cut, because, they said, "the road always had been so;" the said road being a mere track, and no better than any other part of the plain. Soon after reaching the main route, we passed on the left the remains of a small fort of the same type as those that mark the old Persian frontier to the north, and which we now came upon occasionally in travelling towards the East. I was in hopes that, by making a long march, we might reach Deh Mollah that night, and have a short

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his army of 30,000 men here for thee months in 1832, previously to his departure for the siege of Herat. Everything was devastated by the Persian troops. With them it is all one and the same thing; friends and enemies are alike pillaged. Fragments of a mosque in burnt brick, built by the Arabs with considerable art and taste, still remain; but the modern Persians have disfigured it by repairing its crumbling walls with mud and straw. Two elegant and lofty minarets, also built by the Arabs, have been respected by these ruthless destroyers, and, though a small cupola which graced the top of one of them has fallen, they are very interesting specimens of Eastern architecture. The streets of Damghan are planted on each side with the jujub-tree. The citadel, which is on the western side, crowns an artificial mound of earth, and commands both the city and the country. The wall of the town and several forts in connection with it are in ruins at several points. When in a good state of repair, these works were quite strong enough to resist the attacks of an Asiatic army. Here the unfortunate Shah Rokh, grandson of Nadir Shah, committed suicide at the age of sixty-four, and it is said he was induced to commit this act by the injuries and sufferings resulting from the horrible tortures he was put to by Agha Mohamed Khan Kajar, to force him to give up the diamonds he inherited from his grandfather.—FERRIER.

journey into Shahrood the next day. But night fell and the mules were tired; so we halted at Soffiabad, a village about four miles from Deh Mollah. We had marched thirty-five miles and descended 700 feet. We encamped outside the village, near a small stream. G—— took the opportunity of bathing, but was so molested by the curiosity of the women of the village that he had to beat a retreat.

September 2nd.—On our march to Shahrood we passed Deh Mollah, which is the centre of a number of villages. There were many kanaut streams, running down from the range of mountains which lies to the north of the road, and runs parallel to it. These kanauts form the only water-supply. A kanaut is a boring made into the side of the mountain where water is likely to be found. When a spring is pierced, the water is carried by a sort of underground tunnel until it reaches the village it is intended to supply. It is then distributed by different watercourses, and employed in providing the people with a water-supply, and irrigating the land under cultivation. In many parts of Persia, now barren and deserted, one comes across the remains of old kanauts, proving that a much greater extent of ground was once under cultivation; but it is scarcely likely that the kanaut supply alone could have maintained the large population of Ancient Persia. It is more probable that, as the original forest and cultivation disappeared through famine, war, and neglect, these kanauts were made to supply the deficiency. Except in the neighbourhood of Teheran new kanauts are rare; but there can be little doubt that repairing the old ones on a large scale would be a very profitable speculation, provided that peace, progress, and good government could be looked forward to in Persia.

We marched twenty-three miles before arriving at Shahrood; which is surrounded by the usual mud-walls, with small towers at intervals. Exactly the same sort of works probably existed in the days of Nadir Shah.

A COSSACK OF THE LINE.

CHAPTER VIII.

Shahrood—Bostam—Budusht—Meyomeed—Myano Dasht—Abbasabad—Muzenoon.

The town of Shahrood and the neighbouring town of Bostam (four miles distant), form a very important position. As a strategical point, it has not its equal in value in all Persia. South of Shahrood the country, at first barren, soon becomes a perfect desert, which extends right away to Yezd; and to the north lies the great range of mountains which extends to Mazanderan and to Astrabad. The only direct road leading from Herat and Khorassan to Teheran passes Shahrood; and, although there are roads to the Caspian (and good ones, in a military point of view), this place virtually commands the route from East to West, for here is an abundant water-supply and a most fertile country. The climate, too, is healthy, and on the plains of Bostam an army of 60,000 men might easily be assembled and maintained. A glance at the map will show the important strategical position that such a force would occupy.

Away to the East there is a great dearth of water for more more than a hundred miles, and an army could only advance by driblets and would be crushed in detail. The road from the West is much easier, and comparatively

well watered between Damghan and Shahrood; but west of Damghan again occurs a vast tract of barren country almost destitute of water. Thus a large force assembled between Damghan and Shahrood would virtually separate Eastern from Western Persia, either acting towards the west or towards the east.

The road from Astrabad enters the Bostam plain through a pass that might easily be blocked by a fort. This should be the great military station of Persia; but, as usual, nothing has been done, and, in case of war, Russia could occupy this important position in three days' march from Astrabad, or in five days from Ashourada. Curiously enough, there is an old tradition that here will be fought a great battle between England and Russia for the supremacy of the East. Whoever first gave rise to the idea must have had some notion of military positions and their strategical value.*

* Shah-Rood contains about nine hundred houses, an ill-constructed citadel, bazaars with thatched roofs, two or three caravanserais and baths. The soil in the neighbourhood of the town is well irrigated by a small river of excellent water, and, as well as an immense breadth of garden ground, is well cultivated. This town, being situated half way on the road between Teheran and Meshed, and at the point at which all those of Mazanderan and Upper Khorassan meet, is a place of great commercial and strategical importance. It has been for some years the entrepôt for every kind of merchandise, and especially for the rice of Mazanderan. The manufacture of boots and shoes is the most celebrated in Persia, not only for the elegance of the workmanship, but the quality of the leather. The population is a mixture of the natives of Mazanderan, Khorassan, and Turkistan; but the latter are the most numerous. The climate is temperate and healthy.

Bostam, situated about a parasang more to the north, is renowned for the great fertility of its soil, delicious air, beautiful streams of water, and excellent horses. It is here we begin to meet with the breeders of that race of Turkoman horses, so much esteemed by the Persians. The cotton goods of this locality are also held in great repute. Bostam is the chief place of the district, commencing at Deh-Mollah and terminating at Abbas-abad. Thirty-eight villages, all rich and fertile, are within its limits. Formerly this district was the last dependency of the Little Komus towards the East. If the Russians ever take Mazanderan, which

It was fearfully hot when we reached Shahrood, and very few people were about in the streets. We passed right through the town, and encamped by a stream close to the road, on the Bostam side, as I preferred being near to the water where it entered the town rather than where it emerged. Our camp lay under a magnificent row of plane-trees, and the stream that flowed past was beautifully clear. We pitched the large tent with the walls partly over the little river, so that it actually ran through our tent, and afforded a charming and most private bathing-place. It also gave an air of luxurious coolness that was very refreshing, more especially as the weather was intensely warm. We had not been long encamped when the usual present of fruit arrived from the head-man of Shahrood, and he himself soon afterwards appeared. The fruit, would have made a perfect picture; a train of servants brought it on the large circular silvered dishes or trays which are so generally used for the purpose. Two of these were piled up with magnificent peaches; two with the most beautiful grapes of many sorts; one with pomegranates, and one with figs; and, when they were laid down in our tent by the side of the clear crystal stream, the whole scene was worthy of being recorded by the hand of an artist. The Shahrood grapes were excellent, and the head-man placed a garden at our disposal, in which we could revel, if we pleased, on this delicious fruit.

The Governor of the district, who lives at Bostam was away, but expected back shortly. Three thousand

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is very probable—for they have, in the first place, coveted it for a long time; and in the second, because no one can prevent them—Shah-Rood and Bostam will be most important positions for them, and, when fortified, will form a *tête de pont* against the Persians.—FERRIER.

infantry soldiers were encamped there, and we were sorry to find that cholera was raging amongst them. I therefore gave orders that no communication was to take place with the camp; but the soldiers were passing backwards and forwards all day on their way to Shahrood, and we were very lucky in having no cases amongst our party. We were told that it was impossible to go farther without an escort, on account of the Turkomans, but that a caravan, escorted by sixty infantry soldiers and a gun, would be leaving in about ten days' time on the road to Meshed. This involved a much longer delay at Shahrood than we had intended. A few days' rest, however, was absolutely necessary for the ponies and mules, which were rather done up. Poor G——'s animals were in a bad way. His beautiful little pony, Macaroni, had such a sore back that he could not possibly be ridden for a month or six weeks, and his black pony was dead lame. Meshidi Hassan, our cheery muleteer, was delighted at the prospect of getting his mules into condition again, and all the servants were equally pleased at the long halt; but we fretted and grumbled at the waste of time.

We had not been in camp more than a few hours when we had an opportunity of finding that it was as easy to be "done" in the collection of curiosities in the wilds of Persia as in the haunts of Wardour Street.

A man, who appeared to be passing casually along the road, got into conversation with Shaab, and asked him if we should like to see some ancient coins which had been dug up in the neighbourhood of Damghan. Knowing that old coins and old relics are found in that vicinity, which is supposed by some to be the site of the ancient Hecatompylos, we greedily took the bait. He produced a handful of coins, some of which looked curious

and ancient; but I noticed that the same die on one side appeared on coins evidently of two different eras. This he endeavoured to explain away, but succeeded lamely. Presently I came upon this die again on an evidently newer coin, and on looking at the other side discovered the head of Queen Victoria. I need not say that thereupon he was quickly bundled out of camp. We afterwards heard that he was a notorious forger of ancient coins, which he sold to the pilgrims on the way to Meshed, who were not so likely to be surprised at the head of Her Most Gracious Majesty being dug up at Damghan as we were. This little event created such distrust that some time afterwards, at Koochan, I believe I lost some really valuable coins from the fear of being again deceived.

September 3rd.—We had a general rest. A report came in that six Turkomans had plundered some camels on the road we were going; but we had not much fear of being stopped by that number, even without an escort. We were rather amused, for the Russian Minister at Teheran had sent us a message through Capt. Pearson during our stay on the mountains, begging us not to go on, as he had positive information that 6000 Turkomans were on the road between Shahrood and Meshed. We had sent back word that we could not think of being stopped by mere rumour, and now the 6000 resolved themselves into six!

Gerome, who went into the town and discovered the Russian Agent, with whom he fraternized, appeared the next morning looking very seedy. Evidently he had suffered by his friend's conviviality. He brought us a bottle of Kahetie wine; but it tasted so much of the skin in which the wine had been kept that it was almost undrinkable.

Although the big tent was very comfortable, it was so unwieldy that I made an attempt to buy another; but, not succeeding, we left the outer walls and top with the head-man, and only took the inner, thus getting rid of more than half the weight.

September 4th.—We had a visit from a cobbler, who declared himself to be shoemaker to the Shah. He was very anxious for our custom, and brought a pattern of his workmanship. I showed him a new pair of boots by Bowley, of Charing Cross, and he had the assurance to declare that he could make them equally well. We also had a visit from a native armourer, who produced a breech-loading rifle of his own construction. The workmanship was very fair, but I should have preferred his using the rifle himself, for he had evidently a very vague idea of breech-action.

In answer to the inquiries we set on foot as to whether there was any sport to be had in the neighbourhood, we heard there were moufflon and antelope, and that a shikarree could be found who would show us the right country. I own I was very sceptical about the sport; but a few days afterwards in came a man with the body of a moufflon killed that morning. G—— was not very well; so I arranged to start with Ismael the shikarree very early the next day, as the ground was eight miles off, and we ought to be there by daybreak. First starting due west, we then entered the mountains to the north, and made our way up a steep pass, but did not see a sign of moufflon. Eventually, after a hard day, we came down into the valley leading from the Bostam plains to Astrabad. At this point it was broad, but utterly uncultivated; we came across four antelope, but our attempt at hiding and having them driven towards us proved a failure.

On reaching camp, I heard that the Governor had arrived, and would receive us that day; so we rode over to Bostám, and found him a very civil and intelligent man. He entered at once upon politics, and appeared to have decided English proclivities. He said that he knew the north of Khorassan well, and had been to Merv, which he described as a perfect oasis; and he expressed himself as certain that the Russians, having reached the Oxus, would soon occupy it. "Once there," he said, "they will bring a railway, and then Herat will go next." He also told us that the gun and escort would start on the 12th, and recommended us to go to Budusht, a village about six miles from Shahrood, the next day, as we should find the caravan assembling there. He promised me a special escort of sixty irregular cavalry, and begged me to take charge of the whole party, and to give my own directions to them.

Our shikarree was a first-rate shot with a rifle; and as I thought he would prove very useful and it would give one more fighting man, we engaged him to accompany us for the whole trip. The chance of the journey to Meshed was, I expect, the great attraction. That morning (Sept. 11th) a long train passed on the way to Teheran. It was the retinue attending the return of the wife of the Sadar Azim, or Grand Vizier, who, in her husband's absence in Europe, had made a pilgrimage to Meshed. Among her numerous attendants were officers mounted upon some rather good-looking Turkoman horses—fine, well-bred animals, quite as large as English horses and much resembling them; and there were actually two carriages. How they managed to get over some places that we afterwards passed, it was difficult to understand; but, of course, they only went at a foot pace. In addition

to these there were some tracterevans. The tracterevan is just like an Indian palanquin; only, instead of being carried by men, the poles at each end are fitted upon mules. This is the regular Persian conveyance for ladies of the higher ranks on a journey.

G—— had been suffering lately from a sort of low fever, and Said Mati, the tent farash, was laid up with a bad attack of fever; we therefore bought a *kadjevah* and put it on the strongest mule. A *kadjevah* is a sort of covered pillion, or two sedan chairs hung one on each side of a mule. It is used by women or sick persons in Persia, sometimes with a mule and sometimes with a camel.

In the middle of the day about twenty of our cavalry escort appeared. Irregular they were indeed, and their officer was not forthcoming. As soon as they heard that we should not start until the afternoon, all but five of them went off to Budusht at once.

They were the wildest-looking troopers possible, mostly Tartars, but of mixed race, and they told us that they came from the Turkish frontier. Yet there was very good material amongst them, both in men and horses. Most of them were armed with a double-barrelled gun, slung over the back, a sword, and a knife; a few had pistols in addition. They were perfectly independent, and had little or no idea of drill or formations of any sort, and still less of discipline.

We found a large caravan of some 700 persons assembled at Budusht, but the gun and infantry escort had not arrived. This caravan was composed principally of pilgrims to Meshed, and was the most heterogeneous assemblage that it is possible to imagine. Some of these people had come immense distances. There was a whole band of men from Lesghia, north of the Cauca-

sian mountains, Turks from Asia Minor, Khoords from the Turco-Persian frontier, and Arabs from the wilds of Arabia; men and women, both alive and dead, for many occupied coffins were transported with the caravan for burial in the holy city. Some had very nice Arab or Turkoman horses; some were on little yaboos or on donkeys. We heard here that the *chapar*, or postman, travelling with a small escort, had been murdered by the Turkomans the day before, about fifty miles on the road to Meshed.

Budusht is a large village, and was evidently at one time a place of much greater importance than it is at present. Here again I found the ruins of one of the old raised forts, similar to the ancient frontier forts of north-western Persia. As I visited and examined it most minutely, I will give a description of it, which will serve for the rest; for they are all of the same character, though varying much in size. This was a small one, 640 yards in circumference.

These works, composed of solid earth, are raised to a height of from sixty to a hundred feet. There is no ditch round them, but it is evident that the earth of which they are composed has been dug out from the ground for about 200 or 300 yards round, as this is always on a rather lower level than the surrounding country. The Budusht fort was a perfect ruin, and the rain had washed great gaps in its sides. These gaps disclosed quantities of old broken pots, of patterns varying from those now used in Persia, and I have no doubt that a careful search with spade and pick would reveal some curious remains. I carried away some broken pieces of pottery, and also came upon a coral bead. Coral is very rarely seen in Persia now; and, as I found this in a cleft worn away by the rains, it was probably of

considerable antiquity. I never met anyone who could assign a date to these forts. There is a tradition on the Turkoman frontier that the larger ones in that country date back to Khosro; and, as one of them is called Khosroabad, this may be so; or they may be even of anterior date. Jah Jerm is the best preserved of any that I have seen; but that is and has been occupied, and doubtless often repaired. But they are so solid, and have hardened to such a degree with age, that they will still stand for centuries to come as monuments of a past and more enduring page of Persian history.

I also came across an old ruined caravanserai, built of burnt brick and with wonderful solidity. Part of it was in very fair order, and it might easily have been repaired; but this is never done in Persia. Every sovereign builds a new one of mud or unburnt brick, and gives it his name. I paid a visit to the assembled pilgrims: we had anticipated an outburst of hostile feeling from this body of religious fanatics, but found them all apparently well-disposed. Perhaps the additional cavalry escort which through us was to accompany the caravan had something to do with this friendly feeling. In the afternoon the gun made its appearance. It was an old smooth-bore field-gun, and there was an escort of about sixty infantry, or mounted rifles more properly, for they were nearly all mounted on donkeys. They were not regular infantry, but irregulars armed with rifles. At the end of the barrel, and attached to it, were two crooked forks fitted on with a hinge, which served as a rest to the rifle when kneeling down. The captain in charge, who was a magnificent specimen of a man, was mounted on a very handsome grey Arab.

Finding that the whole of my new command was assembled, I gave the order to march at twelve that

night, and let the whole caravan know the hour of starting.* But, as usual, at twelve o'clock nobody was

* No greater misery can be conceived than that of travelling with a caravan, the *désagrémens* of which are many and various. The ordinary muleteers are the greatest liars upon earth, and annoy you in every possible way. The *djilo-dar*, he who has or holds the bridle, or chief muleteer, is a very different character. He is generally an intelligent, honest man, and familiar with the roads, towns, villages, and habits of the various tribes of the countries through which he journeys. Merchants often place large sums of money in his hands for transit, and I have never known one of them betray his trust. His horses or mules are usually sound and in good condition, and it often happens that a djilo-dar owns from thirty to fifty of each. The lower orders travel on asses, on which they place enormous loads. It is true that, when they arrive at a halt, they take the greatest possible care of them. Not only do they feed them well, but currycomb them, wash them, shampoo their legs, twist and pull their noses, ears, and tails, and talk and pray for them. No father can have more affection for his child than a Persian has for his ass. Once in motion the caravan breaks into small parties of ten or twelve persons; that of the djilo-dar is at the head of the column, and there, in front of all, he puts his best beast, to set an example to the rest by her steady and sustained pace. This mule is always gaily caparisoned, the harness covered with embroidery and other varieties of decoration, in addition to the bells which give notice of the approach of the caravan. After these detachments comes the merchandize; also carried by mules, and those travellers who have only half, nay, sometimes only a third, of an ass, for there is often a triple partnership, ride and tie; and the foot passengers bring up the rear. All halts and hours of march are determined by the djilo-dar. If there is no caravanserai, he selects the camping-ground: and the goods are ranged, under his orders, in a circle or a square, round which the travellers sleep, the space within being reserved for the horses and mules, which are tethered to a long pole. The djilo-dar is, as he well need be, an active fellow, for he has sometimes to look after five or six hundred mules, their burdens and their drivers, who are ten thousand times more troublesome than their beasts. When the halt is made, he announces the hour of departure for that day or the next morning; he also regulates the pace, or stops the caravan, by various cries, which are passed from mouth to mouth along the road.

When a caravan is attacked by robbers, the Persian muleteers, if armed and having the advantage of position and numbers, generally defend themselves with spirit; but, if there is any doubt as to the probable result, they think only of their mules, cut the harness, throw off the loads, and, leaving the merchandize to its fate, gallop off as hard as they can go. It is curious, but, when these scenes take place, the mules seem instinctively to scent the danger, and show it by their energy and rapid strides, in singular contrast to their usually quiet and regular pace. A caravan of

ready. The cavalry escort were all still asleep; the officer could not be found; and it was past one before we could get a dozen men together. The caravan the while was eager to start, and the narrow street of Budusht was crowded with mules, camels, and donkeys all in utter confusion. I got to the head of the column and kept them in check, until I could collect the several escorts; but in the meantime I let them file out of the village and assemble on the plain beyond. I told off the

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of mules or horses, on an ordinary paved road, will carry from four to five hundred weight, and with that burden will get over one parasang in an hour and a half; but in the desert, for instance, between Meshed and Bokhara, or in the mountains as in the Mazanderan, the distance travelled will not be so great in the same time. Delays not unfrequently occur, for the Persian muleteer is most exact in his observance of the exterior forms of his religion; which, however, is rather a proof of his hypocrisy than of his morality, for I am convinced that, generally speaking, he more often prays to God to help him to cheat and pilfer his customers than to entreat His assistance in keeping him in the right path. But, be this as it may, it is curious to see them, at the hour of prayer, running in front of the caravan to go through these forms. Sometimes there is no water with which to perform their ablutions. In that case a handful of earth serves the purpose of purification—dirt, not water! With this they rub their faces and hands, and reciting their *namaz* like so many parrots, and in a language which they don't understand, resume their journey. With them, as with us, faith and forms can alone save them. When the latter are strictly performed, and they rigidly observe the fast of the Ramazan, they think they have a right to commit every species of rascality and crime, and without being in any way called upon to give an account either in this world or the next. This does not apply to muleteers only, but it may be said to be the Persian rule of faith; everything for their creed and nothing for morals.

Provisions are to be obtained at almost every village; but if they are at a great distance from one another, or it is at the period of the year when the Persians keep their horses on green food, that is between May and July, the caravan rarely encamps near the towns; and then the djilo-dar gives notice, and the traveller lays in a stock. Poultry, eggs, and milk are to be had in most villages; but rice for the pilau, the best and most nutritious food in Persia, is not always to be met with. *Ab-dookh*, a favourite dish with the Persians, and very refreshing, is not at all suited to the stomach of an European, and should be carefully avoided. The caravanserai-shahs are handsome buildings, but the filthy habits of the Persians make them very disagreeable.—FERRIER.

different arms, as seemed best in case of an attack, and at last having got some semblance of order, and having pushed forward some scouts, gave the word to move on.

It was a beautifully bright moonlight night, and the road, or rather track, ran through low, sandy, undulating hills. I rode at the head of the column with the main body of the cavalry escort. Directly the order was given to advance, there burst forth loud and sonorous cries of "Yah Ali! Yah Ali!" and the whole mass pushed on at a pace which I thought could not be long maintained. It seemed to be a regular race. Many of the poorer pilgrims were on foot, and dashed to the front at a rate that was worthy of an English pedestrian. It was in vain that I urged the escort to keep something like order. The whole caravan, camels, mules, donkeys and footmen, came surging forward amid a dense cloud of dust. Prominent amongst the culprits was Meshidi Hassan with our own mules, and I could recognise the deep-toned bell carried by the leader, which long acquaintance had made so familiar. Hour after hour passed away, and still with unflagging spirit the dense mass poured on; the rate of marching being so good that we had nearly reached our halting-place, by daybreak. But, as day dawned, there was a general halt, and the devotees prostrated themselves in prayer. It was a strange, curious, and impressive scene. Ameyun was quite a small village, situated in some low hills, and there was but a poor supply of water for the large numbers composing the caravan.

Our next day's march was to Meyomeed, only fifteen miles; so I ordered the start for 4 A.M., as there was no object in arriving at the camping-ground so early, and the night marching only led to confusion. To my horror, about 12.30 a wretched artilleryman woke up,

and immediately began bugling. The consequence was that the whole caravan prepared for the march. It was too late to correct the mistake without keeping the poor people up all night. I therefore sent them on at once with the infantry escort and gun, and we followed quietly and much more comfortably at four with the cavalry.

Meyomeed was a fine village, lying at the foot of two remarkable twin mountains, which form a landmark for many miles round, as in the distance they seem to rise suddenly out of the great plain. Looking to the north, a great barren steppe extends for thirty miles, and then a long range of mountains is seen running east and west. Between Meyomeed and Miyane Dasht, the next station, some small sandy hills follow the road; and these are favourite places of resort for the Turkomans. Soon after our arrival at Meyomeed, a beautiful present of fruit appeared, with a notification that the Governor would pay us a visit in the afternoon. We rested during the day, and in the afternoon he came: an intelligent man, with the perfect manners which are generally found among the higher classes of Persia. He told us some curious stories, showing the singular state of the country in this perpetual war with the Turkomans; and he sent for a Turkoman horse which he considered to be a very good specimen of the class. I had heard so much of these Turkoman horses and of their extraordinary powers of endurance that I was curious to see some reputed good ones. The animal in question was a bay, of about sixteen hands, with very fair points, and showing the peculiarities of the Turkoman breed; namely, a little inclination to lightness of neck, good deep shoulders, but rather narrow, a little long in the legs, and the tail set on rather low; otherwise it might have been mistaken

for an English thoroughbred. I asked the Governor the usual price of such a horse.

"Oh! I never buy them," he replied. "I send a spy amongst the Turkoman villages, and he finds out anyone who has a good horse, remarkable for powers of endurance and general quality. Then I make my arrangements, and despatch a few well-mounted men at night. They carry off the horse, and come right away here, perhaps 100 or 150 miles, without stopping except for a few minutes' halt." There did not seem to be the least feeling of shame at this system of horse-stealing. On the contrary, it was looked upon as a very creditable performance.

I was anxious to learn at what pace these extraordinary journeys were performed. "In the event of danger," he said, "they come along at a steady gallop, and we do not consider a horse worth having that will not gallop forty or fifty miles without stopping. Afterwards, when there is no danger, the pace is reduced to a fast walk or amble of about five miles an hour; and they ride on night and day until they arrive here." I had previously at Teheran heard reports of the endurance of the Turkoman horses. In the races at Teheran they always beat the Arabs, although, curiously enough, good Turkomans are scarcely ever seen at the capital. At Shahrood a man showed me a bad, leggy specimen of a Turkoman, which many people assured me he had ridden from Meshed to Teheran, 550 miles, in four days, on more than one occasion. I own that at first I received these extraordinary stories of endurance with suspicion; but, from instances of the powers of these animals that have come under my own notice, I do not now discredit them.

In the afternoon we went out partridge-shooting, but

with little success. Ismael was more lucky, and brought in a good supply.

I found out that another caravan and escort was approaching from Meshed, and that, when we met it, the two would change escorts. My cavalry were anxious to know whether they should go on with us or turn back with the others; and as I felt convinced that with the large number of men in the caravan, and with our infantry and gun, there was very little dread of Turkomans, I decided that they should return. They were much disappointed thereat, and a small deputation waited upon me.

"Why not take us with you?" they said. "We have had no pay for six months. Give us a little pay, and we will follow you anywhere."

"But I am going a long way," I answered. "I may go into Afghanistan or into the Turkoman country; who knows? You are the Shah's troops, and belong to Bostam. How could you come with me?"

"We don't care in the least for the Shah," they returned. "Only give us some pay, and we will follow you wherever you choose to lead us, and we will fight for you as hard as you like."

There were some splendid fellows among them, if only they had been drilled and disciplined. I explained to them that, as they had been given to me simply as an escort by the Governor of Bostam, they must return there, and that I could not take them on. They did not seem to see the reasoning, and sent word to me several times afterwards that if I would only give them a little pay they were ready to go anywhere. This incident showed me how easy it would be for anyone having the command of sufficient money to raise an independent force of irregulars in Central Asia, for they are nearly

all the same. Only pay them, and they will follow you, fight for you, and ask no questions.

We had not got over half our journey when there was a sudden alarm of Turkomans in front. The scouts galloped in, and there was immense excitement. I was surprised and pleased to find that my cavalry escort were all full of fight, and that there was not a sign of shirking. We took up a very good position covering the caravan, and large clouds of dust were seen approaching. Guns were unslung and loaded, and the infantry were hurried up; but we at last discovered it was the Meshed caravan that was arriving. They soon came up, a long straggling party of about a thousand people, marching without any order, and covering between four and five miles of ground. No wonder that they are waylaid by small parties of Turkomans. Here we changed escorts, and I bade adieu to my cavalry followers. We had to give considerable presents, of which I found afterwards that Shaab kept nearly half, and we parted the best of friends.

The captain of the new escort of infantry, or "shooting men," as Shaab always called them, was mounted on a superior horse. Evidently he was very proud of its speed, for he was constantly having short spurts with some of the better mounted men belonging to the caravan, in which he was always victorious. We sighted the large caravanserai at Miyane Dasht for a long time before we reached it, and when about four miles distant I cantered on. I had no sooner started than the captain galloped past me and pulled up; and he continued to do this, obviously most anxious for a race. Knowing that Cremorne, though only a large pony, was very fast, I gradually increased my speed. Again the captain galloped past. We were now only about two

miles from the caravanserai; so I just sent Cremorne along at a good rattling gallop. My friend, who had pulled up, again came past me at a great pace, but not so easily this time. I kept on, and saw that the captain was urging his horse along ahead of me at his best speed. That, I knew, could not last. Another quarter of a mile and I was alongside of him, and, the horse collapsing soon after, I left him far behind and cantered into Miyane Dasht alone. Cremorne was a little wonder, and could do anything.

It is impossible to imagine a more miserable place than the great caravanserai of Miyane Dasht. The country around is a perfect desert; but the caravanserai itself accommodated the whole of our caravan. Preferring to run the risk of Turkomans to the dirt within, we camped outside. It was a most defensible and solid building, and could not have been taken without artillery, if decently defended. Here we had the first serious difficulty with our establishment. Shaab and some of the other servants quarrelled, and we soon heard that the cook and two of the men had gone off in a huff. However, as there was no place for them to go to except the caravanserai, I made pretty certain they would return. Soon it transpired that Shaab was in the habit of robbing us to any extent, not openly (for he could be trusted with any amount of money), but by charging double for everything he bought, and only paying away in reality about half of the amount he was told to disburse. The other servants now wanted their share of the plunder, and, as Shaab would keep it all himself, a general quarrel had ensued.

The water supply at Miyane Dasht was very indifferent. We had passed two small streams between it and Meyomeed. The next march to Abbasabad—twenty-eight

miles—was also supposed to be dangerous, and it was on this road that the *chapar* had been killed only a few days before. We came upon the spot, and the clothes of the murdered man were still lying there covered with blood. The country was undulating, but a barren desert, like all this part of Persia. There was a small well about two-thirds of the way.

Abbasabad, originally a colony of Georgians planted there by Shah Abbas, was a village of desolate aspect. At the entrance to the village we met an extremely intelligent boy, of Georgian extraction, who had been recently captured by the Turkomans, and carried off beyond the Attrek, about one hundred and fifty miles, but who had been ransomed about a fortnight before. He was about twelve years old, and gave a most interesting account of his capture and treatment. He had gone out a little way from the village to collect the dry prickly bush used as fuel in Persia, when he was pounced upon. They put him on a horse in rear of a Turkoman, and galloped for many miles, until they came to the great mountains. On reaching a pass (which, I imagine, must have been near Jah Jerm), they found that it was occupied; so turned aside, and made their way over the mountains by a foot-path. Here, he said, they halted for a short time; then they pushed on and crossed a river (which must have been the Gourgan), and within a few hours a broader river, which came up to the saddles of the horses. This must have been the Attrek. His family had ransomed him for 55 tomauns (£22).

It is quite a common thing in this part of the country to find people who have been captured by the Turkomans and ransomed. The Russian Expedition to Khiva of course destroyed the trade in Persian slaves amongst the

Usbegs, which formed the great livelihood of the Turkoman tribes. Thus the market has been very much diminished, and the Turkomans now only take captives in the hope of obtaining ransom. But it is to be doubted whether there will not be more bloodshed, for if there is no hope of ransom the captives will certainly be killed. The Persian governors on the frontier adopt the same system, and usually keep Turkoman prisoners a considerable time if there is a chance of ransom money. This ransom is generally paid by the Turkomans in the shape of horses or carpets, since very little ready money ever passes.

I had been suffering for many days from a wasting illness, and was getting very weak and low. My things hung loosely upon me, and I was rapidly becoming quite a feather-weight.

The next day we marched to Muzenoon, thirty miles. A small stream of water runs about four miles from Abbasabad, and about half way there is a caravanserai and well. We passed the dry bed of the Pul-Ebrishim, a small river which usually has water in it. Over this is a brick bridge, beyond which the Turkomans rarely penetrate further eastwards. It was weary travelling over interminable plains. Away to our left lay a range of mountains, from three thousand to four thousand feet in height, running east to west, as do nearly all the ranges hereabouts. Muzenoon at last appeared on a round hill, raised some two or three hundred feet above the plain. It was evidently a place of some importance, and we could see two or three green patches to the south that marked the existence of villages. It was most refreshing to see even those small signs of population, after the vast stony waste that we had now been traversing for some days. We were quite surprised at

the size of the houses, and were very well located in one, which saved the trouble of pitching the tent, and was much cooler. There were two very large caravanserais standing side by side. One was in ruins, the most beautiful I had yet seen, and evidently of very ancient date, the gateway being particularly fine; its fellow was only of the common order. Here we parted with our escort, which was no longer necessary; and also bade adieu to the caravan.

CHAPTER IX.

Mehr—Subzawar—Sultanabad—Maidane—Nishapoor—Derrood—Jugherk—Gulistan.

THE next day we marched to Mehr, twenty-three miles. There was no water on the road for the first nineteen miles, until we came to the village of Sutkar. Our road lay over great stony plains, and from the nature of the stones washed down from the mountains, it was evident that copper existed. On inquiry I learned that copper was extracted by the natives from mines in these same mountains, and I collected several specimens; but they were not very rich in ore. We saw three antelope on the plain, and tried to drive them—with the usual effect. Mountains lay away to the south, and some curious detached sugar-loaf-shaped hills, rising out of the plains, were visible in the south-east.

For some time past I had been trying to instil habits of punctuality into our followers; but my exertions were rewarded with the poorest possible results. We never could get them to be ready at the time appointed for the morning's start. Nobody ever is ready in Persia, and old residents in that country never attempt the task. I tried fines; but that did not answer, for I found that, if I persisted, the men would have no wages! I used to

have Shaab up, and also Meshidi Hassan, the muleteer, when the following scene would occur:—

"Late again one hour to-day. Meshidi Hassan was not ready with the mules; I shall fine him."

Meshidi Hassan only showed his teeth, and smiled blandly (nothing ever put him out), while Shaab apologized thus:—

"I not wake master in time; my watch go to sleep. Meshidi Hassan he not bring mules; all servants get very lazy, so come late."

"Well, now," I remonstrated; "to-morrow morning everyone must be in time. Take my other watch, and mind and call us at two o'clock. We march at three."

Everybody made great promise of amendment. In the morning I would wake and strike my repeater. Three o'clock, and all the camp fast asleep.

"Shaab!"

In would come Shaab, rubbing his eyes.

"Why, it's three o'clock, and no one is up!"

Shaab would thereupon rush off, and abuse one of the servants. Loud outcries, and general quarrelling ensue; and, as I look out of the tent, everybody appears to be on the point of fighting with everybody else; but it is only wordy war. At last things settle down. The cook lights a fire, and makes coffee; we dress quickly; the servants pack the things; and mule after mule is brought up and loaded. At this point there is a final fight between Shaab and Meshidi Hassan about some mule that has not got its proper load. We go out to the fire and drink our coffee. Down comes the big tent, which is rolled up and loaded on its respective animals. The ponies are now brought up to us, and about four o'clock Shaab reports all ready, when we mount and start. Cook and Aboo Cassim are in close attendance, with

breakfast in their side-bags; our guide, with Shaab on his Arab as interpreter is just behind us; and Gerome in rear of the baggage. Then the loud, deep bell of the leading mule sounds vigorously and regularly, and the softer tones of the others ring out in musical chorus; and so we advance into the night, over the parched and desert wastes for many a day and many a weary hundred miles.

September 19*th.* — To Subzawar, thirty-four miles. About four miles from the town we passed a curious old minaret of burnt brick of the time of Khosro. Subzawar was the most important place that we had reached since leaving Shahrood. Outside the town there were many walled gardens, full of quince and orange trees, and in one of these we pitched the tent. The Russians have an agent here; and he kindly came and offered us his house; but, as we found it took much longer to get the servants off in the morning if we occupied a house, we politely refused. We had made up our minds to strike off the main road, and make our way to the turquoise mines at Maidane. The Governor gave us two Khoord *gholams* (or horsemen) as guides, and we were told we should have to pass a bad part of the country, where the people living in the black tents were great robbers. The neighbourhood of Subzawar showed signs of very considerable cultivation in the past, but the famine which had occurred a few years before had ruined it utterly. The neighbouring villages were deserted, and everything was running to waste.

We started the next day in a north-easterly direction for Sultanabad, twenty-four miles. Meeting a party of pilgrims coming from Dereguez, we made anxious inquiries from them relative to the northern frontier; but, as we afterwards visited that place, I will not give the

information obtained. One of our *gholams*, who was a fine old Khoord, and a very civil, intelligent fellow, professed to enlighten me largely respecting the Perso-Turkoman frontier. He had often been employed against the Turkomans, and knew the whole boundary line; and much of his information subsequently proved to be correct, but there were many glaring inaccuracies, especially with regard to distances.

After traversing a low range of mountains, we emerged on some large plains. Many of the rocks showed signs of copper, and there is considerable mineral wealth in this vicinity utterly unexplored; but the dearth of fuel will probably prevent its ever being made available. This was a very hot day, and both G—— and I had a slight touch of fever on our arrival. Sultanabad was a wretched village, but there was a nice little house belonging to the Hissama Sultana, in which we were put up. On this march from Subzawar we had ascended only 1800 feet at the highest point reached, and we descended 1000 before we arrived at Sultanabad.

Our old *gholam* came in the evening to tell us that between this place and the mines there was a large plain to cross, infested by robbers who would have full information of our approach, and, knowing the valuable nature of their prize, would be very likely to make an attack. I own I was not very uneasy. We could arm nine men including ourselves, and the two *gholams* made eleven; and I much doubted any desultory bands of robbers attempting such a raid on open plains. At four we marched to Maidane, the turquoise mines (twenty-three miles). Our old *gholam* was very cautious, and we sent on his companion well ahead as a scout. The mules and muleteers were as usual most annoying. When we were marching with the caravan, we could

not keep them back; they were always pushing on to the front, no matter how fast we went. Now, however, although we were moving slowly, it was impossible to keep them up. Every now and then we saw small parties of men prowling about, apparently without any ostensible object; but we marched with every precaution, and no attack was made. The turquoise mines are situated about half way up a low range of mountains. There are two villages of Maidane, the upper and the lower; and it was to the former, as nearest to the principal mine, that we made our way. It was only 800 feet higher than Sultanabad, and we pitched the camp in a grove of trees outside.

There is one great curse attending travel in Persia. It is the bad water. Ordinarily clear water, such as one is used to in England, is scarcely ever found, and one becomes accustomed to drink a fluid which cannot be seen through in a tumbler. Our servants used to be quite amused at our constant search for the best water. At Maidane we were told that there was an excellent well, and it certainly looked far above the average; but on going to it a little later, just as our people had been drawing water for our use, we found a number of women bathing in it, and washing their clothes.

I was anxious to obtain, if possible, some specimens of the different minerals that abounded in this neighbourhood. The Persians are always imagining that they have discovered silver and gold, and several men came to us in a mysterious way, bringing specimens which turned out to be different varieties of the commoner metals. Having heard of an extraordinary mountain about ten miles off, supposed to be rich in minerals of all kinds, we sent Gerome off the next day "prospecting;" but he returned with only some not very rich copper ore, and a

few beautiful specimens of crystallized salt. It was perfectly white and pure, and Gerome declared that there was a whole mountain of it.

On the day after our arrival we visited the principal mine, first ascending the mountain for some hundreds of feet. Before reaching the entrance we came upon many thousands of tons of loose stones that had been excavated from the mine, among which I have no doubt many a valuable turquoise still remained, and at its entrance we were received by the head of the works and conducted into a dark cavern. It was some time before our eyes became accustomed to the light. Soon, however, we perceived that an immense excavation had been made in the mountain, and that it descended to a considerable depth, not by a shaft, but by high and irregular galleries; and the constant hammering and picking in the far distance gave an idea of the great extent of the mine. As the rock was picked out, it was broken up by the pickers, and any turquoise that came to view extracted. Then the rubbish was carried away in baskets and carefully sorted by experienced hands, who quickly detected any turquoises remaining. In this sorting we were allowed to assist. I was astonished at the number of turquoises found, and equally astonished at the small number that were of any value. When they fall out of the rock in which they are encrusted, they have a white, irregular exterior; but they are often broken in the process of picking out the rock, and the blue interior is then exposed; but, instead of the bright blue stones we see in England, nearly ninety out of every hundred are soft and chalky, and of a pale blue hue. These are not valuable; but occasionally a fine stone is discovered and it fetches a very considerable sum at the pit's mouth. I was inclined to think that the price we

were asked for good stones was as high as would have been charged in London. Shaab, however, contrived to make some advantageous purchases. I bought a piece of the rock with turquoises embedded in it. One small piece which I rejected was subsequently found to contain a turquoise of three-quarters of an inch in length, but of very inferior quality.

On our return to the village we saw the process of cutting, or rather grinding, the stones. We were taken into little miserable hovels, where we found men working with a rough grindstone, and pincers made of a split piece of wood, with which they secured the turquoises. They ground the surface just sufficiently to expose the colour and nature of the stones. There were pecks of turquoises lying about, yet we did not see half-a-dozen really good stones of even moderate size. More than a hundred different mines exist in the side of the mountain, and there seems no possibility of the supply ever being exhausted. It does not appear that either better or worse stones are found at the deeper levels; and sometimes as good turquoises will be discovered in the friable deposit as in the rock itself. The extent of the frontage of the mines is about three miles. It is quite possible, however, that the supply is not entirely confined to this spot.

The really good stones are purchased at the mines by merchants, who take them to Meshed, where they are more carefully cut, but still so indifferently that they are usually recut on their arrival in London or Paris. The common chalky, light-coloured stones are sold in Persia, where they are largely used for the decoration of the silver ornaments that form the horse-trappings of the chiefs on the frontier. It is difficult to make out what becomes of the mass of small, indifferent stones

which, when cut, are usually glued on to the end of small pieces of wood in bundles, looking precisely like lucifer matches with blue heads, and just about the same size. I believe the women in the harems and anderoons throughout the East wear them as ornaments, and they are also bought in Russia.

September 23rd.—To Nishapoor was a march of thirty-six miles. Nishapoor is an important place. It lies on a great plain, bounded on the north by high mountains, from which numberless streams run down and irrigate the country below. The whole plain is studded with villages, and it is evident that at some former time cultivation existed on a much wider scale. It would form an admirable place for the concentration of an army. A hundred thousand men could be here assembled and watered.* A very good house in a large garden outside

* Nishapoor was in former times one of the richest and largest cities in Persia, and one of the four royal cities of Khorassan. European authors inform us that it was founded by Shah-Poor, the second of the Tassanide kings, about A.D. 250. Hence its name, to which was added neï (or nee) signifying a reed both in Ancient and Modern Persian; and this, says tradition, because the plain in which Nishapoor was situated was then covered with reeds. But in the opinion of Persian historians the city was of much more ancient date. Its founder was, they say, Tahmurat, third King of the Pish-Dadian dynasty. It then bore the name of Aber-chehr, or the Upper Town, and was taken and destroyed by Alexander the Great. Shah-Poor restored it, and, to perpetuate the fact, gave it his name, and erected an immense statue, which remained standing until the first invasion of the country by the Mussulmans, who in their zeal destroyed it. Nishapoor also suffered greatly from the invasion of the Arabs; and it would have utterly perished had it not been subsequently rebuilt and repeopled, first by the Taherides, and afterwards by the Soffarides. Mahmood, the Ghaznevide, who later still and in the reign of Sebek-tagy, his father, was governor of Khorassan, fixed his residence at Nishapoor; which contributed much to its prosperity. Toghrul Beg, the first sultan of the Dynasty of the Seljookides, also resided here, and his princely liberality restored it to its former splendour; but in the year 1153 (Hejira 548), and in the reign of the Sultan Sarojar, one of the Dynasty, the Turkomans took and ravaged it so completely that, in the words of the Persian historian, Khagani, when the inhabitants, who had fled at the

the town was prepared for us, and here we parted with the *gholam*. I was getting very weak with my constant illness, a mere shadow of my former self.

The next day we marched to Derrood. Two roads lead from Nishapoor to Meshed; of which the longer goes by Sherifabad and avoids the mountains. But there is a much shorter route, though not so good a road, over the mountains by Derrood. We found this one of the prettiest villages we had yet seen, lying in the gorge just at the foot of the pass, and with a beautiful stream dashing down the narrow valley, clothed with trees and gardens on each side. Passing the village, we encamped at a charming spot under a gigantic old tree in immediate proximity to the mountain torrent. Our men were in high good humour at nearing Meshed, and sat up half the night singing.

The love of poetry and story-telling, which is supposed to be characteristic of the Persians, has not been ex-

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approach of these hordes, returned after their departure, it was impossible to recognise, amidst the mass of ruins, the position in which their houses once stood. Nevertheless, such was the fertility of the country, that, with the assistance of the princes of Khaurizm, into whose hands it fell after the Seljookides, Nishapoor rose once more, like a phœnix, from its ashes. But the disasters which attended the fate of this unfortunate city were not yet over; for in 1220 (Hejira 617) Kooli Khan, son of Ghengis Khan, besieged and took it. This monster was even more savage than the Turkomans, for he not only made it a heap of ruins, but massacred the inhabitants and the people of the adjoining territory to the number of two millions. From this period Nishapoor became the sport of fortune in every possible way, reviving and perishing in turn, and has never regained its ancient position and prosperity. Placed on the extreme frontier of Persia on the side of Tartary, the Mongols, the Turkomans, and the Uzbeks sacked and plundered it almost from year to year. Towards the commencement of the eighteenth century, it was little more than one vast ruin, and it remained in this deplorable state until after the death of Nadir Shah. In 1752 (Hejira 1166), after having stood a six months' siege by Ahmed Shah, King of the Afghans, it was to some extent restored by Abbas Kooli Khan, chief of the Beiyat tribe who declared himself ruler over this district.—Ferrier.

aggerated. In every camp groups may be seen listening with intense interest while some fable is being narrated, or some poetry, often improvised, is being recited. One of our muleteers, Hoosein, was the poet of the party. He carried with him a small sort of guitar, and would sit before the camp-fire at night for hours together, singing long songs of his own composition; to which the other muleteers and servants were never tired of listening. They were generally love romances; which appears the more extraordinary as the restrictions of Mahomedan life and the seclusion of the women would seem to interpose considerable obstacles in the indulgence of the tender passion. Perhaps the usual spirit of opposition in human nature induces the Persians to listen the more greedily to recitals which paint it in glowing colours. Be the cause what it may, however, Hoosein could always command an attentive audience.

On the following day we crossed the mountains, marching twenty-three miles; and, as we neared the summit of the pass, the cold was intense. We were told that on reaching the top we should see Meshed in the distance, whereas we found ourselves surrounded by clouds, and could see nothing.

We now descended until about four miles from the large village of Jugherk, and encamped at a very pretty spot. While the tent was being pitched, a letter-carrier arrived from Meshed bringing us a bag of letters, newspapers, &c. We therefore had a long afternoon's reading of all the home news, and studied the old numbers of 'The Times' and 'Pall Mall Budget;' which latter, by-the-bye, is a capital paper to have sent to you when on a wild foreign expedition. We also found a most civil letter from Abbas Khan, the

British news-letter writer or agent at Meshed, for the Legation at Teheran. Abbas Khan said he should come out and meet us the next day. The climate here was quite charming, but I was becoming worse. It was, in fact, getting serious, for it was very evident that it would be impossible to go on much longer unless a favourable change ensued, and medicines seemed to produce no effect upon me. We stayed at this camp the next day, when Abbas Khan arrived about noon. An Afghan by birth, he proved to be a particularly pleasant man with excellent manners; but he had been at Teheran for a considerable period. He dined with us, evidently pleased to show that he could use a knife and fork, and eat like an Englishman; and he asked us to go on the morrow to a place called Gulistan, only fourteen miles off, and thence to march into Meshed, fourteen miles more, the next day, when we should be properly received, and horsemen sent out to meet us. But he gave us some bad news affecting our future movements. Hussein Khan, the Persian Governor at Meshed, it appeared, was not on good terms with the Turkomans at Merv. No caravan had come through for a very long time; and Abbas Khan, who considered that it would be impossible to reach it by Sarakhs, suggested the advisability of our going on to Herat, and thence obtaining from Yakhoob Khan an escort to conduct us to Merv, by the Moorghab. This seemed an excellent idea, and it tallied with my views exactly; but our hopes were soon dashed.

"You have an order from the British Government to go into Afghanistan?" he asked.

I was obliged to confess we had not. The then Government had refused to take any responsibility in the matter.

"Then it is impossible to go to Herat," he said; "for some time ago an English officer wanted to make his way from Teheran to India. He got to Herat and was very well received by Yakhoob Khan, when orders came from the English Government that he was not to be allowed to proceed, and that no Englishman unprovided with an order from the British Government was to be received at Herat, or allowed to enter Afghanistan."

This was heart-breaking. After coming all this distance, at a considerable risk and expense, to find oneself thwarted, not by difficulties proper to the occasion, but by want of support from one's own Government, seemed too hard. And the position was embittered by the fact that we had no private object in view—no thought of anything but getting useful information for our country. Subsequent events made this still more painful, for, a few months afterwards, Captain Napier was sent from India to Meshed; and he followed our footsteps for a great part of our route.

I was not, however, quite hopeless; for I had written to Lord Northbrook from Teheran, begging him to send to Shere Ali, and to request him to give us every facility for passing through Afghanistan.* I therefore determined to push on towards Herat, trusting that Yakhoob Khan, by the time we got there, might have received the message from India. If not, we could make our way

* My letter was unfortunately delayed on its rather complicated journey to India. Lord Northbrook, however, no sooner received it than he most kindly sent instructions to the Commissioner at Peshawur to request Shere Ali to forward my views, and to allow me to pass through Afghanistan even to India if I wished to do so. Curiously enough, Shere Ali refused. This shows how foolish we have been in our attempt to completely isolate Afghanistan from English travellers or traders. Not long after this refusal, a Russian agent was received at Herat. Yet we are accustomed to believe that our influence is paramount in that country.

down the Heri-rood to Sarakhs, and explore the unknown Perso-Turkoman frontier. The Governor of Khorassan, we learned, was about to march to Sarakhs with 3000 men. This would give us a good opportunity for exploring the Heri-rood, as it was not likely that any large bodies of Turkomans would remain in the neighbourhood with so considerable a Persian force in their rear. The want of a Government order proved our great stumbling-block. With it I could have gone to any part of Central Asia: and I own it was with some bitterness of feeling that we found our action cramped by this omission. It was a difficulty that I had foreseen, but the order had been refused lest it might involve action by the late Government, in case of our deaths by violence.

The next day we marched to Gulistan, through a narrow but very fertile and well-watered valley. Trees grew on both sides of the road, and the whole country looked prosperous—a great improvement upon the barren tracks we had wandered over lately. We encamped in a large garden where there was delightful shade. Gradually I grew worse. Fortunately I could eat rice and eggs, but I was getting painfully weak. The next day it was arranged that we should enter Meshed in uniform, and be met by a party of horsemen with the usual ceremony. We started at noon. Abbas Khan had a richly caparisoned and very handsome Arab horse brought for me, and Gerome was mounted on Cremorne. We soon got a view of Meshed. The great mosque of Imaum Reza, with its gilded dome, is an impressive object, and it is visible from a great distance.

CHAPTER X.

Meshed—Turokh—Sangbust.

MESHED contains 80,000 inhabitants. It lies on the plain in the centre of a broad valley some twenty miles in width, and is surrounded with the usual high mud walls and flanking towers; but the town makes no pretension to fortifications which could resist artillery fire. In the neighbourhood, especially towards the north, there are many villages and gardens, but the south side is barren. We had a very hot ride over the plains, and about four miles from the town found a hundred mounted men drawn up to receive us, under the son of the late Governor of Sarakhs. At the gate we were met by a number of farashes on foot, who cleared the way and kept off the crowd.*

* M. Ferrier gives the following description of the town and mosque:—Meshed is surrounded by a dry ditch and mud wall, about four miles and a half in circumference, incapable of resisting any regular siege. The citadel, situated on the south-east side, is in a bad state of repair; the construction is of the same plan as all other Persian fortresses—an oblong, with large towers at the angles and smaller ones at intervals, connected by curtains. Within the enceinte of the town are numerous cemeteries of immense extent, far exceeding the requirements of the resident population. The explanation of this is, that hundreds of devotees whose bodies are brought from a considerable distance round Meshed are buried here in order that their remains may be near those of the Imaum Reza, in whose good company they hope one day to journey to Heaven, and enter the Mussulman paradise. Besides these open spots, there are

I was greatly disappointed with the town. The houses were poor, and the streets so narrow that two horsemen could not ride abreast with comfort. However, a good house had been prepared for us, and Abbas

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some gardens to the west of the town; but these are being cleared away to make room for houses, which are rising on all sides.

There is only one remarkable building in Meshed—the mosque, in which is the tomb of the Imaum Reza. This is situated in the centre of the town, and divides the Khiabane into two parts. The Khiabane is a magnificent promenade, extending from one end of the city to the other, that is to say, from the gate of Herat to that of Koochan. A large stream of running water flows along its whole length, shaded on either side by fine plane-trees, and retail shops line each side of the avenue. The merchants meet in very handsome caravanserais of recent construction, and in the bazaars, which, though roofed in, are narrow and of small extent, quite unworthy of such a city.

This Khiabane is the general rendezvous of the population of Meshed. To it also resort all strangers, and the crowds of people assembled between the hours of eleven and two are so great that it is difficult to thread one's way amongst them. The noise and bustle are then indescribable. Fruit, sherbets, and other refreshments, with all kinds of Eastern productions are spread out on the banks of the stream, frequently under the very feet of the ever-passing and crowding people, who jostle and take little heed of the remonstrances of the owners of the wares. To these may be added the clamours to buy, with all the chaffering that takes place when a bargain is being driven in the East. The result of all this is a loud hum, that may be heard at some distance from the animated and picturesque tide of human life.

The commerce of Meshed is, in some respects, important in connection with the surrounding and distant countries. Sugars, which are brought from the refineries of Yezd, form a considerable article of trade. These, as well as every kind of silk and cotton goods, glass, porcelain, and delf, brought from Teheran, but of European manufacture, are forwarded to Central Asia; and hence the merchants receive in return Kashmir shawls, black lamb-skins from Bokhara, assafœtida, camel's-hair cloth, called *barek*, fur cloaks made at Kabul, camels from Khiva, and Turkoman horses, which are for the most part disposed of in Persia. There is also a large sale of articles manufactured in the province of Meshed. Of these the first in importance are its magnificent carpets, perhaps unequalled for colour, wear, and beauty in the world; and shawls of a Kashmir pattern, called in Persian *meshedees*. These are held in greater estimation than those of Kerman. The felts and the light silk goods (the produce of the silk in the north) should also be mentioned; and arms, particularly swords, which have a great reputation.

The quarries in the mountains, a parasang south of the city, furnish

Khan proved a perfect treasure. Nothing could exceed his kindness and attention. The change to a house did me no good. I now rarely slept for more than an hour or two, and felt that I was wasting gradually away.

A difficulty had occurred in our domestic arrangements, which gave us endless annoyance during the remainder of our journey. Shaab had been giving some trouble from his constant desire to make money. He repeatedly tried to camp in villages when he had been positively told to camp outside them; and I had him up and spoke very seriously to him. He was trying, we also heard, to persuade all the other servants to desert us *en masse*, frightening them with accounts of the dangerous countries through which we should conduct them.

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the material for another branch of local manufacture—a stone of blackish tint, somewhat resembling plaster, but much harder. This is an excellent substitute for delf or glass, and is made into many articles of prime necessity, such as cooking-pots, vases and jugs of every pattern and shape, tea-cups, tea-pots, sugar-basins, and salt-cellars. Assafœtida is also a production of Khorassan.

The principal mosque of Meshed is an imposing edifice, not only from its size, but the rich and costly materials of which it is constructed. The building is divided into two parts; the first into a large square court, in the form of a caravanserai, with two storeys of small apartments looking into it, where the pilgrims are lodged gratis. This court is paved with large flag-stones, the walls being covered with enamelled bricks, or rather varnished. The blue ground of these brings out in strong relief sentences of the Koran, which, in gold and white, ornament this magnificent place of worship from the base to the summit. Shah Abbas the Great was the founder of this portion of the building; and Nadir Shah subsequently restored it.

The second division consists of the mosque, the work of Goher Shah, of Timour origin. It covers the tomb of the Imaum Reza, which is of marble and decorated with arabesques of most admirable workmanship. A massive silver railing, surmounted by gold ornaments, surrounds it; and a large cupola and two minarets, remarkable for their bold conception as well as elegant form, rise above this monument. From half-way up to the top these are externally covered with rich gilding; and, when the rays of an Eastern sun are shed upon them, they dazzle with their brilliancy the eyes of the spectator.

As the main object of the servants had been to get to Meshed, and they were now there, it seemed all the more probable that he might be successful. I knew there was no time to lose; and therefore ordered them all to be assembled immediately, when I told them that if there was a question as to whether they would follow us farther, or not, they were free agents, and might go or stay as they liked, but that Shaab who had misbehaved was from that moment disrated as head servant. They must decide at once as to their future course; and I announced that Gerome would take Shaab's place. Abbas the farash immediately decided that he would stick to us, whereupon all the others followed suit. Shaab was summoned and dismissed, and Abbas appointed in his place as my personal servant. The next day Shaab presented himself very penitent. He confessed that he had tried to persuade them all to desert, but begged forgiveness and promised amendment. The loss of his services at this time was to us very great, for he was a man with excellent manners, and he thoroughly understood all the forms of Persian etiquette. In the various visits that we had to pay, or in sending on in advance to announce our arrival, he was invaluable. Moreover, he was our only Persian interpreter. Gerome spoke Turkish, and some of the other servants spoke both Turkish and Persian; but this involved a double interpretation, which was very confused. Consequently, after some time I took him back, but only in the capacity of interpreter; and, as Gerome now made all payments and purchases, Shaab had no opportunity of following his favourite pursuit of making money out of his masters.

In the course of the morning presents arrived from the Governor; trays of the most uneatable little cakes

and some loaves of sugar; and he fixed three o'clock next day for receiving us. When these presents arrive, you always pay the servants who bring them about double the value of the presents. Thus it is by no means a profitable transaction! Abbas Khan arrived a little later. He had news from Dereguez that a considerable number of Turkomans, terrified by the tax imposed by the Russians upon the Turkomans near Khiva, had applied for permission to come in and settle on Persian territory and to become Persian subjects. Abbas Khan also told me that he knew the Governor of Dereguez, who was an excellent man, and would, he felt sure, receive us gladly; but that at the present moment he was on very bad terms with the Governor of Khorassan. We should therefore require to be diplomatic on this point in our interview appointed to take place on the next day.

September 30th.—Accompanied by Shaab and Abbas Khan, we paid our visit to the Governor, in uniform and with great state. Chairs were provided for our accommodation. We found the Governor, who was not very well, surrounded by his officials; and, as usual, directly the ceremonious speeches which always commence a Persian interview had been got over, he turned immediately to politics. Abbas Khan had warned us not to mention our intention of going to Herat, but to ask for a general order for such escorts as might be necessary, together with letters for the Governors of Sarakhs, Kelat, Dereguez, Koochan, and Boojnoord. To this he made no objection; only he advised us not to go to Dereguez. Upon my representing that we were most anxious to visit all the frontier, however, he gave way after a time. I had a long talk to him about Merv. He declared it would be impossible for us to get there,

but maintained that it really belonged to Persia. In this case why, I inquired, did he not occupy it?

"We do not want it now," he said; "perhaps some day we shall take it again." He offered to send a man the next day, who would give all information about Merv, where he had lived for many years.

He spoke at length of the Russian encroachments, and was very anxious to know how far England intended to let them advance without remonstrance. They were already beginning, he maintained, to occupy territory that really belonged to Persia; and he alluded to the burning of Kizil Arvat by a Russian column.

"Why," I asked, "do you not occupy your own territory, instead of letting it fall into the hands of the Turkomans?"

Shrugging his shoulders, he answered, "Perhaps some day we shall do so. They are troublesome people."

At the conclusion of our interview we went home by a different route, so as to see the town. It is a wretched place, so unlike our dreams of these far Eastern cities.

October 1*st*.—Abbas Khan called early; and, having heard of my desire to procure information relative to the great mineral wealth supposed to exist in the neighbourhood of Meshed, he brought a man named Malek, who was connected with the few mining operations in activity. Malek presented specimens of the different ores, and offered to show us an old and unworked copper mine that existed not more than five miles from Meshed. His specimens showed fairly rich copper ore, and very rich lead combined with silver. But the great difficulty in this country lies in its want of fuel. Malek declared there was a coal mine in close proximity to the lead; and he afterwards obtained specimens. These specimens,

though showing indications of the presence of coal, were not really coal, but shale; and at present, from want of roads and wheeled carriages, the cost of transport is so great, that if pure lead could be found it would not pay the carriage to Russia or other parts of Europe; whereas, if a coal mine could be worked here, copper would pay enormously. The cooking-pots and a number of articles in constant domestic use amongst the Persians being made of either brass or copper, there would be a great home demand; to supply which copper is largely imported into Persia, although the country abounds in it.

In the evening we rode out to see the copper mine. The workings were ancient, but not extensive; and they did not then seem to be very rich. The gates of all the walled towns in Persia being closed at sunset, Abbas Khan had made arrangements for our entering the town after dark; but some mistake had occurred. On our arrival at the gate we found it closed, and had to wait over an hour before, the error being rectified, we could gain admission.

October 2nd.—We were very anxious to see the different products of the district, and the principal articles which formed the trade of the town. Accordingly, silks, shawls, turquoises, and barek (a cloth made of goats' hair) were brought to us.* The quality of the silk was

* A cloth called *kourk* or *barek*, woven of an exceedingly fine and silky wool which grows on the belly of the camel. Nothing can be softer or warmer than these bareks, but unluckily they are badly woven. If they were better made, they would be preferable to every other kind of cloth. As the nomads never dye the raw material, the barek is of the same colour as the camel. The price varies from ten shillings to four pounds a piece, and one is sufficient to make an Afghan robe. The Afghan and Persian nobles, even the sovereign, always wear it in the winter. The wool, a kind of down on the other parts of the animal, is used for kourks of an inferior quality. This down is preserved from the effects of the weather

very poor, and the prices high. The turquoises were generally indifferent, and much dearer than they would have been in Bond Street; but some pretty *kaliouns*, or pipe-heads, inlaid with turquoises and rubies, were produced; and these we bought for comparatively very moderate sums. They were all subsequently stolen on their road to England. They were very elegant in shape, and of quaint workmanship. We were also shown some curious specimens of the Meshed stoneware. These form articles of common use, such as basins, cups, &c. They are remarkably neat, and the designs cut upon some of them are uncommon and in excellent taste. They are cut out of the solid stone, which is soft and easily worked, and of the consistency of slate. Two kinds are used; one like very dark slate, the other of a blue-grey colour, and they are very cheap. Unfortunately, nearly all the specimens I selected were broken on the journey home.

Meshed is renowned for its carpets, which, although not to be compared with the finest carpets made near Teheran, are of a beautiful texture. In the afternoon we went to see their manufacture, and the principle appeared to me much the same as that adopted in the manufacture of the Gobelins at Paris. A large carpet was being made in one of the rooms we entered, and about a third was completed. The border was of admirable workmanship, with the most curious and exquisite blending of colours, altogether a work of art; and we should have gone away much impressed with the good taste of the designer, had not the officials been most anxious to show us the whole of the pattern, when, to our horror, we found that the centre was to be a steam

by the wool that covers it, which is used for kourks of the coarsest description. A down similar to that which grows on the camel, but infinitely superior in quality, grows under the hair of the goat, and cloth of incomparable beauty and quality is made of it.—FERRIER.

engine drawn by a horse! Whether this was intended as a covert protest against the progress of science in the West, or to show the contempt of the Persian mind for an improved system of communication, I cannot say; but it certainly destroyed all our bright dreams of Persian taste. And whilst upon this subject let me remark that, although in their carpets, exquisite designs are worked and beautiful combinations of colouring attained, this is almost the only point in which they do not show vulgarity of imagination. In their houses stained glass is commonly introduced with a most gaudy and coarse effect; and the outside decorations are of the same character. The wooden framework of the windows is often of very intricate and pretty design, but all the colouring of the walls and their pictures are in the worst possible taste. In architecture they are equally behindhand. There is no modern building that I know of in Persia that even merits mention, and in the interior decorations a temporary tinselly effect is all that seems to be aimed at.

As we continued to explore Meshed, our feeling of disappointment increased. There is one long and tolerably wide street through the town. A stream runs down its centre, and by its side grow a few trees. This street forms the great approach to the Mosque of the Imaum Reza; which we were unable to visit, as any attempt to do so would have led to a popular outbreak. Knowing this full well, and the veneration in which it is held, together with the fact that an endeavour to see it made by Mr. Eastwick had nearly resulted in serious consequences, I never made the attempt. We had a long and trying journey yet before us, and I was most anxious to study the religious prejudices of the people in every way. This is absolutely necessary for the

traveller in Central Asia. Any carelessness in this respect, or the slightest attempt to violate the social habits and customs of the country, is sure to prove a fertile source of difficulty. It was, I believe, owing to the care always shown by my companion and myself in these respects that we accomplished our arduous journey with so few difficulties.

We paid a visit this afternoon to a very fine old Persian Prince who was a son of Futteh Ali Shah. He lived in retirement at Meshed, and was a thorough antiquary and lover of the fine arts. He had collected some exquisite specimens of old silver and pottery work from the ruins of Damghan and other ancient Persian cities. One of his possessions, a vase of carved stone covered with silver filigree work of a most beautiful antique pattern, would have created a *furore* in Paris or in London. He had also employed workmen to carve, from his own designs, a curious and pretty semi-transparent stone found in the neighbourhood of Meshed; and they had executed very beautiful tables and many other articles with great finish and most perfect taste. I urged him to visit Europe with his curiosities, representing that he would thoroughly appreciate our collections and the different International Exhibitions. He told me that he often longed to do so; but could not make up his mind for so serious a departure from his quiet habits, and that now he thought he was too old to attempt it. The usual *kalioun* was produced, followed by small cups of tea. The *kalioun*, which is too well-known to need description, appears at every visit. An attendant brings it to the chief, who hands it to the principal guest. It is the etiquette for the guest to refuse it at first, and to request the chief himself to smoke; but this is always

declined, and the chief guest then inhales the smoke three times. This is the correct number. It is then passed to the chief and eventually smoked by the other guests. As the mouthpiece is of wood, this indiscriminate smoking by many mouths is not pleasant. After each person has finished, he blows out the smoke remaining in the *kalioun* before handing it on.

Tea is now served in Persia quite as often as coffee. It is handed round in small and sometimes pretty china cups. The tea itself is usually good, but it is mixed with sugar and over-sweetened. Occasionally small pieces of lemon are introduced, as in Russia; but this is rare, as lemons are not procurable in the uplands of Persia. When the *kalioun* is called for a second time it is a signal for the visitors to depart.

October 3rd.—I was anxious to see specimens of the lambskins so much worn by the Persians, which in England are commonly called Astrakhan; but why so denominated, it is difficult to understand, seeing that they come principally either from Shiraz in South Persia, or from Bokhara. The Bokhara skins are much the more valuable, fetching treble the amount of those of Shiraz.

Two more horses being required, several were brought to us which we did not like; but on this day two nice-looking animals appeared, a grey and a bay. We rode them in the afternoon, and, approving of them, effected their purchase for fifty tomauns each, or 20*l.* The grey turned out a most useful animal. He carried me nearly all the rest of the journey without ever getting sick or sorry, and is now in England.

The evening was spent in the uninteresting but necessary occupation of counting *krans*. The kran (10*d.*) is a small silver coin, but it is the largest in

general circulation in Persia. The difficulty this occasions in travelling may be imagined. In the first place, as there are no banks and no other circulating medium, large quantities of silver coins have to be carried; thus affording a great temptation to robbery; and in the next, the tediousness of counting out 400*l.* or 500*l.* in tenpenny-pieces may be imagined; certainly it cannot be realised. The krans are usually carried in little red leather bags, which hold about 100 tomauns each. There is also a half-kran called a *bunabat;* so that, if a considerable sum happens to be received in bunabats, the work of counting is doubled.

We had given a native merchant in Teheran a certain sum for his bill payable at Meshed, but now found that we should require a larger amount. We had no difficulty whatever in getting the money in the bazaar by giving bills on Teheran to cover the amount. It was very pleasant to find that English credit stood so high in this out-of-the-way place. We drew, if I remember rightly, about 300*l.* in this way without any hesitation being shown; but as a counter-balance to our pride at this faith in the national honour we had to count the amount in krans and bunabats.

October 4th.—I was getting very ill, although still struggling on day after day. It was impossible that this could last much longer, and here we were about to commence the most useful, but most trying and dangerous part of our expedition; a task requiring plenty of health and strength. I now rarely slept at all at night, and was reduced to a shadow, very weak and with no sign of improvement; in fact, it was impossible to conceal from myself that I was dying by inches. Only those who have travelled widely and successfully in very distant and unknown lands can fully feel the trial of

pushing on and severing yourself farther and farther from all hope, when sickness has laid its heavy hand upon you. While health and strength last, to push on and overcome every difficulty is the first and natural impulse; but it is in the hour of illness, when the body and mind are weakened and wasted by disease and suffering, that stern resolution to conquer or to die is so much needed. This is why we find so few successful explorers in Central Africa, where constant sickness has to be braved.

During those sleepless nights at Meshed, a tempting voice, I must confess, would sometimes expostulate, and seem to say, "Return while yet there is time, and reach the Caspian. Sea air alone can save you. Why rush to certain death? You are not on duty. You are merely trying to carry out a useful work for your country. Will your country ever thank you for it? Back to the Caspian, while you still can move." But before morning came the vision was chased away, and I again gave orders to prepare to move forward.

I had sent a letter to Yakhoob Khan at Herat, and had intended to travel slowly in that direction, hunting antelope and wild asses on the plains whilst awaiting his reply; but I was now too weak for thoughts of sport. An Afghan agent of Yakhoob Khan had come to visit us; and he evidently was most anxious to know the true object of our journey, and whether there was any chance of good tidings for his master, for Yakhoob was now on very bad terms with his father, Shere Ali, and naturally jealous that Abdullah Jan, his youngest brother, had been nominated to the succession. Clearly it was hoped that we might have a diplomatic mission relative thereto; and, although I stated at once that this was not the case, I was not credited. Considering

that words are intended to conceal the thoughts, an Afghan never believes you.*

October 5th. — Starting for Sangbust, distant about twenty-seven miles, we halted for breakfast at Turokh (nine miles), where are the ruins of an old mosque. About half way between Turokh and Sangbust there is a well of good water. At the latter place were numerous streams, and we were located in a curious building that looked as if it had once belonged to a large stable, for there was stabling all round it for numbers of horses. This march completely knocked me up. At last it was painfully apparent to me that nature could stand no more. The sun had been very hot. Feverish and utterly exhausted, with my tongue all blistered and cleaving to my mouth, I had suffered tortures; yet I knew that to drink the bad water we came across in my state was death. Such, however, was the agony of thirst, that often, lying down, I washed my mouth out, and bathed my face and head in the welcome fluid. I was much worse all night, and in the morning it was evident that moving forward was hopeless. So G—— and I consulted, and decided to return to the neighbourhood of Meshed, and there await the answer from Yakhoob Khan. Making our way across the country to the north of the town, we camped in a tolerably shady garden about five miles from Meshed.

When saying good-bye to Abbas Khan the day before, he had begged me to use a Persian medicine, common in the bazaar, which he represented to be most

* I have always deeply regretted that the order of our Government prevented our going to Herat. I feel sure that the influence we might have exerted would have prevented the serious outbreak which occurred between Yakhoob Khan and his father, and which ended in Yakhoob being imprisoned at Caubul, where he still remains, and where he probably will die suddenly and unaccountably. Yakhoob was the finest and most promising son of Shere Ali.

efficacious in dysenteric affections. As I had consumed all my own medicines without producing any effect, I agreed to try his remedy; which consisted of a small seed, somewhat resembling linseed and called in Persia *barhang*, made into a tea like linseed tea, with the addition of a tea-spoonful of oil of sweet almonds. My diet was restricted to rice and a mash made of almonds and sugar, not unpalatable. The effect was marvellous. In two days I improved immensely; and, though I had recurrences of the disease, by immediately flying to *barhang* I managed to continue my journey.

Learning that the Governor of Khorassan was staying at a small garden-house in the country only about two miles from us, we sent him a present of a very nice double-barrelled rifle, and had a message in return, to the effect that he was anxious to present a horse, and would be very glad if we would come to see him the next day. We had a civil letter from Yakhoob Khan, from Herat, saying that he would much like to receive us, but that he had the most positive instructions from the Indian Government not to do so, unless I came with an order from the British Government. It was evident that he had not received any communication from Lord Northbrook, and I was reluctantly compelled to give up all hope of reaching Merv by way of Herat and the Moorghab. And another disappointment came at the same time. The Governor of Khorassan had determined not to visit Sarakhs. As this would interfere considerably with any design to explore the Heri-rood, and we also heard that we should barely have time before the winter and snows to traverse the frontier between Sarakhs and the Caspian, if we delayed any longer by travelling eastward, I determined to push on at once to Kelat, and then to work as far as possible to the

west, north of the great range of the Kuren-dagh mountains.

I was so much better on the 8th, that in the morning we visited Hussein Khan, whom we found much more civil, which I shrewdly suspected was from the fact of our Herat trip being given up. In the afternoon he sent us a horse, a very indifferent animal that was never of the slightest use; and we had to make his servant who brought it an additional present of ten tomauns. Giving and receiving presents in Persia, in nine cases out of ten, means much giving and very little receiving. We had wished the Governor good-bye; and, as I was anxious to lose no further time and felt stronger, we started for a short march towards Kelat in the afternoon. And here let me describe the different roads which run from Meshed to the most important points, east, north, and west. First, there are no less than three roads from Meshed to Herat: one by Sangbust, Turbat Shaikh Jam, and Kussan; another a little south, and running almost parallel; and a third still farther to the south by Turbat-i-Haidiri, Khaf, and Ghorian. To the north-east, the road to Sarakhs follows the Keshef-rood river, and winds through the mountain range by the Durbund Pass. By all the roads to Herat and by this road guns could be conveyed. Farther still to the north, there are two mountain ways to Kelat impracticable for artillery, but guns can get there by going first to Sarakhs and then across the plains. From Meshed to the north-west, there is a good road practicable for artillery through the broad rich valley which leads to Koochan, Shirvan, and Boognoord.

The Keshef-rood rises in some springs near the ruins of Toos, and flowing a few miles north of Meshed, runs through the Durbund Pass to Sarakhs; near which

it is joined by the Heri-rood, which river, after running past Herat, winds to the north and the two after their conjunction are called the Tejend. This flows through the desert, some thirty to forty miles north of the Kuren Dagh mountains, and winds to the west parallel with it. Its course is marked by immense reed-beds, and it becomes gradually smaller from evaporation until it ends in a large reedy marsh at a place called Tejend, which is a favourite resort of the Turkomans, and where there is some cultivation. Tejend lies almost due north of Abiverd.

CHAPTER XI.

Kardeh—Hale—Wardeh—Kelat—Kala Nadir.

On leaving the camp near Meshed, we only marched about ten miles before night fell. We crossed the Keshef-rood by a massive brick bridge. Nearly all these Persian bridges have pointed arches, entailing a steep ascent and descent. We encamped just outside a small village, at which was an establishment for making *shira*, or grape-honey. The juice of the grape is boiled down until it is of the consistency of treacle; in fact, it has a taste something between treacle and honey. This is very popular with the Persians in all districts where the grape flourishes.

Starting early the next morning, we soon began to enter the mountains. The country was much cultivated, and numerous large villages were passed. At length the valley narrowed into a mere gorge, through which flowed the stream which fertilizes the land between this and our last night's halting-place. In some parts smaller streams joined it from the mountains on either side. One of these small streams seemed to be strongly impregnated with copper. The rocks of a little basin into which it ran were bright green; and curiously enough there was a small fish swimming in it of quite

a greenish hue. After proceeding about eighteen miles the gorge widened out into a valley of about two miles broad, evidencing natural fertility; and beyond it we saw a village by the side of the river, which looked promising. This was Kardeh, our intended halting-place. Here two streams joined, and three valleys united; one running towards the N.N.E., the other towards the west, and the third to the south, by which we had come. The valley, running westward, joins the main Meshed-Koochan valley, at a distance of twenty-one miles, and along its course lie the villages (according to Abbas Khan) of Gewesherwar, Bara, Gurk, Aguaz, Miamenah, and Ardek.

Like all the villages in this country, Kardeh was a little fort. The interior was a regular rabbit warren. How the people manage to live in these places is a wonder. The closeness, the filth, and the smells are beyond belief, and the usual combination of execrable water, which the people seem to prefer, will probably account for the gradual diminution of the population. We found it a great comfort having Abbas Khan with us, as he could converse through either Shaab or Gerome, and he kept the former in good order. On the next day's march we were told that we should cross a mountain range to Wardeh, a distance of twenty-nine miles; so we started early, marching up the valley to the N.N.E. We halted for breakfast near the village of Hale, nine miles in advance, where another valley turned off to the N.N.W., in which, at the distance of about three miles, lay a large village named Boohoo; but we still followed the gorge to the N.N.E. This gradually became narrower and narrower until in some places it was not twenty feet wide, with rocks coming sheer down on either side; a mere cleft in the mountain.

The ascent was continuous, and at last we broke rather suddenly upon beautiful mountain slopes with a very considerable amount of vegetation, and the juniper tree standing not in woods, but singly, or in small patches. It looked a lovely country for game; but, except partridges, we saw nothing. There were high mountains both to our right and left front; great majestic ridges of rock, sometimes taking fantastic shapes, and with their strata running vertically, as if disturbed by some gigantic upheaval. In places the sides of these mountains were sheer precipices, while the ridges looked perfectly sharp.

We wound by a zigzag up one of the easiest passes to our left, but on getting near the summit the road seemed to end, and we had to look about; farther ascent seeming utterly hopeless. At last, however, a way was discovered, up which our clever horses scrambled like goats; and soon we looked down into a dark valley on the other side. Three miles off, though the distance seemed to be a mere stone's-throw, was the desolate-looking village of Wardeh. The valley into which we now descended was barren and uncultivated, quite different from the fine mountain uplands covered with grass and wood which we had just left. It was getting dark as we reached the village, and after a little time a house was prepared for us—a mere shed, but with a fireplace; and the juniper wood soon made a cheerful blaze.

I was uneasy about the mules, which, in spite of strict orders to keep up, were always lagging behind; and even the mounted servants, instead of remaining with us, were always dropping to the rear. Often had I spoken about this lately; and, being now in a country where small straggling parties of Turkómans might be encountered, I had threatened to inflict a fine upon all laggards

on the next occasion. We had halted nearly an hour to allow of their overtaking us; yet no signs of their approach were visible. Only Shaab and Ismail were with us. Two hours had elapsed since our arrival, and it seemed evident that they had mistaken their road. I had quite given them up for that night, and had just made arrangements to despatch a messenger to a village which it was thought they might have reached, when they all appeared. As usual, they had fallen behind, and had got off the road; but after wandering about for two hours they fortunately met a villager out shooting, who had directed them safely.

I had them all brought before me, and after a severe lecture fined them. In a few minutes it was evident that something was wrong. Instead of our things being unpacked, no one appeared. We sent out after our respective servants, when Gerome came in, very wrath, with the information that all the servants had mutinied; that they would not obey him, that they refused to do anything, and that they declared their intention of returning to Meshed. We also heard that they had endeavoured to persuade the horsekeepers to desert us. I immediately sent for the horsekeepers, and warned them that we knew what was going on, that these men would certainly suffer; and advised them not to be led away. Old Mehemet Ali, my own syce, who had been in Bombay, pledged himself for the fidelity of the horsekeepers. Still it was a most unpleasant predicament. We did not know how far we could trust Shaab. Gerome worked like a horse, and we cooked our own dinners; but to be utterly deserted *en masse* in this most out-of-the-way part of the country was very serious, especially as Abbas Khan told us there was no chance of getting servants of any description where we were going.

The bull, I saw, must be taken by the horns. We were quite certain that the men would not try to make their way back before morning, and then not very early, from their dread of Turkomans. Sending for the head-man of the village, I showed him my papers from the Governor of Khorassan, and told him that in the morning all these men must be seized and brought to me as prisoners, and that I held him responsible for them from that moment. He promised faithfully that they should not be allowed to leave the village. According to Gerome's statement, Seid Maty, the tent farash, had been the instigator of the mutiny. There was a regular conspiracy, in fact, and they had already been selling some of our things. Gerome had come upon them in the very act of dividing the spoil. He had noticed that Abbas had a gold coin in his purse; and, as gold is very uncommon in Persia, he asked me if I had given him one. I then discovered that a gold Napoleon which had been in my waistcoat-pocket was missing, and this proved to be the coin in question. So here was a clear case of theft.

At a very early hour in the morning back came Zenil Abdeen, G——'s servant, very penitent and begging for forgiveness; which for some time was refused. At last, however, as a matter of policy, he was pardoned. This we knew would sow dissension in the camp of the mutineers. We then set to work ourselves to pack all the things on the mules, and prepared to start. When all was ready, I told the head-man to produce the prisoners. But the pardon of Zenil Abdeen and the preparation for departure without assistance were already producing their effect; and loud lamentations were heard from the men who had been so impudent the night before.

However, determined to make an example, I fixed upon Seid Maty, the ringleader, and Abbas, the thief, for dismissal. The four culprits were laid down in succession, and Ismail applied the stick. An amusing scene now occurred. Abdullah, the cook, carried the whip, and was supposed to be the executioner on such an occasion; but I had endeavoured to rule by moral force (quite a mistake in Persia), and the whip had never been used.* Abdullah was waiting for his own whipping, and Ismail was operating rather inefficiently upon Seid Maty. Abdullah, disgusted at seeing his duty so bungled, rushed forward, and wanted to belabour his fellow-culprit. This, however, was not allowed, and in another minute he was receiving his own punishment. At the termination of this scene, there was a general appeal for forgiveness; and, after a severe lecture, pardon was extended to all but Seid Maty and Abbas, who were dismissed. Even these two men, instead of carrying out their intention of returning to Meshed, were now in abject dread of Turkomans; and they followed in our train.

Nothing could exceed the civility and humility of our followers. I had been too lenient and had spared the rod over much. This Persians cannot long understand. Accustomed as they have been for generations to be ruled only by force and by fear of punishment, they cannot realize a merciful sway. The servants had all been most anxious to go to Meshed and visit the Holy Shrine; but now that this had been done, and they found themselves bound for a strange and wild country, going apparently into the heart of that dreaded land of the Turkomans, all their bad points began to

* In travelling in Persia one servant always carries a whip, which he administers in cases of misbehaviour.

develop. I must, however, do them the justice to say that, except in one or two instances, I did not detect signs of fear so long as they were with us. They simply wanted to get home, not liking the discomfort.

Ever since our departure from Meshed we had met small parties of soldiers, in a wretched state, coming from Kelat. They begged us not to go on there, as everybody was dying of typhus fever; and certainly more miserable objects than these poor creatures it was difficult to picture. Still, having heard of the importance of Kelat, I had determined to see it, and to report upon it; so we pushed forward.

After leaving Wardeh, we crossed the mountain for a considerable distance to a high point from which there was a glorious view. Below us lay a mass of jagged peaks, and we could distinguish the precipitous natural walls of Kelat amongst the lower ridges, while far beyond stretched the great salt desert of Turkomania, extending right away to the Oxus. Soon we began to descend, and coming upon an enormous number of partridges, halted for breakfast and did a little shooting. But here a mishap occurred that might have been most serious in its consequences, and which nearly lost me my staunch companion. G—— and I had separated. The hillside was broken by steep and rocky ravines, and one had to descend very carefully, creeping down over sloping slabs of rock. G——, it appears, was making his way down one of these places with his gun loaded, but on half-cock, and he had rested it for a moment on a projecting ledge, when, to his horror, it suddenly slipped, and, sliding down muzzle upwards, went off, the discharge being straight at him within three yards. Fortunately, G—— had on some large, high, brown leather riding-boots. Directly he

recovered himself, he made his way down to the breakfast place, where I had just arrived. One of his boots was cut all to pieces by the shot, and it was an anxious time until we got them off and examined the injury. Happily, this was not very serious. About nine shots had entered the leg in one place, and five in another; but they were only flesh wounds. Neither vein nor artery had been injured. It was a most merciful escape.

We now descended rapidly, eventually getting into a narrow rocky gorge, with a beautifully clear stream dashing through it. Suddenly we emerged upon a valley about three miles broad, and before us lay the fortress of Kelat.

Kelat, about which so little is known, certainly deserves to be reckoned one of the wonders of the world.

It is a gigantic fortress, formed by Nature, only slightly aided by man. The walls are mountains of from 800 to 1200 feet high, and with a sheer perpendicular scarp between 300 and 600 feet; sometimes more. It is an irregular oblong in form, about twenty-one miles long by from five to seven broad. There are only five entrances through narrow natural scarps, and these are fortified. Three of them are on the northern face, one is on the eastern, and another on the southern. The ground enclosed within is very rich, and it might be a perfect garden and self-supplying. The stream which we had followed runs right through the place, in at the southern entrance and out at one of the northern. There is also some cultivation outside the work; and after being used for irrigating a considerable tract of land this stream is allowed to revert to its natural channel, whereby it forms the main supply of water used by the inhabitants. Hence, I imagine, the great unhealthiness of the place. But there are several springs

within the fortress, and one just outside the southern gate. Moreover, there are numbers of old kanauts, and I have no doubt that an ample supply of good water could thus be obtained for the cultivation of the whole interior. That it once had a much larger population, and was in a more prosperous state, the numberless remains of villages testify. Everything about it now betokens utter ruin and neglect.

The Persians maintain a battalion of regular troops here, besides some irregular cavalry and a few guns. The battalion now occupying it had arrived from Teheran 900 strong, only three months before. Since that time 300 had died of typhus, and the remainder were in the most miserable condition. The officers had all deserted their men, and gone off, and those men who had any money had done likewise; but the mass were left without pay. About 200 still occupied the houses near the southern gate, and a sort of guard was kept up; but the men were in a ghastly state, and lay here and there dying of the fatal scourge. We hastened on for about six miles inside the fortress, until we reached the town, in which was situated the residence of the Governor. Having heard that there was a spring immediately without the town, I refused the offer of a very good house, being anxious to keep all our followers as much as possible from the fever-stricken place; so we encamped by the spring. This water was excellent, and I gave the most stringent orders that no one should cook with or drink any other. Although this spring was within 300 yards of the town, the inhabitants did not come to it; the polluted river water was 100 yards nearer for them. Truly they are an impossible people! These precautions had so good an effect, that we had not a single case of typhus in our camp.

I found that the Governor was away, and had taken most of the irregular cavalry with him. In his absence his son, a nice lad of only about twelve years old, paid us a visit and did the honours. The town had some trace of its former grandeur, in the shape of a burnt-brick building, that evidently had once been a place of some importance.

The next morning we heard that there had been a fight with the Turkomans just outside the gates, and that several had been killed and others taken prisoners. Anxious to see them, I requested that the prisoners might be brought to me. Accordingly, they were marched up, heavily chained, and a Turkoman, who had a pass, attended them. He had come in relative to the ransom of some Persians. They were hard, wiry-looking men, without an ounce of superfluous flesh. One, a mere boy of about fifteen, was Persian by birth. He had been captured in his youth, and now fought against his own countrymen, and also, we were told, acted as a spy.

There is a curious look of merry cunning about most of this race. We had a long conversation with the free Turkoman; and when he heard we were Englishmen he was evidently much interested in us. Being most anxious that the British name should stand well with these people, I interested myself about the prisoners. The Kelat authorities promised me that they should not be executed, but that time should be given for their friends to ransom them; and I impressed upon the free Turkoman the necessity of immediately communicating with these friends. I also left a little money to provide them with food. There was one fine man among them who was reported to be a desperate character, and who had killed two of the Khoords before he was captured. These men had come from Merv, and had only been

thirty-six hours on their journey, riding the same horses that they had been taken on. I examined their captured arms, which consisted of the usual Eastern cimiter and a double-barrelled, muzzle-loading, smooth-bored gun. This is the ordinary weapon both of Khoords and Turkomans. They are generally of very common make, and mostly of Russian manufacture. They thrust in a piece of rag over the powder, and ram down the ball also enveloped in rag. The gun is carried slung over the shoulder, muzzle upwards, so that the ball does not get loose. The powder, which is of local manufacture, is of very fine grain, and they believe in its strength as compared with English powder. I do not.

Poor G—— was obliged to be very careful with his wounded leg; so he moved off for an easy day's journey. while I went to the Kala Nadir, a high hill to the north of the fortress, from which I had been told a wonderful view of the surrounding country could be obtained, and to the remains of the palace of Nadir Shah, who had not only made Kelat his stronghold, but had scarped the rock wherever Nature had failed to do so.

A most intelligent chief of the Khoord irregulars accompanied me. We ascended the hills within the fortress by a zigzag but fair path to the height of 1500 feet, when we came to some beautiful undulating downs of very considerable extent, and a village containing over 150 houses. There was a small spring here, but I was told that it was very uncertain, and that the villagers were sometimes obliged to send down to the low country for water. There was, however, a certain amount of cultivation, proving that there must generally be a fair supply. A little further on we came to the ruins of the old palace, which was of burnt brick, and almost repairable. With what interest one looks at any remains

connected with this great man, who, at a time when the fortunes of Persia appeared utterly desperate, by dint of sheer genius and determination of will, and within a few short years, cleansed his country of foreign enemies, conquered Afghanistan, forced that barrier of mountains which now guards our Indian frontier, and which we are so wont to consider impregnable, and with only 80,000 men crushed those monarchies which it took us a century to subjugate, and, finally marching through the heart of Hindostan, conquered Delhi! To those who know the Persian character, and remember that these events occurred only 136 years ago, the warlike genius of Nadir Shah appears astounding.

Not far from the palace we found the remains of a large well. The water was evidently drawn up by mules, and the whole work was on a considerable scale. It struck me forcibly that these healthy plateaus would be the best places for encamping troops, and I have no doubt that the works of Nadir had some such object in thus providing a considerable water-supply. We mounted the high hills north of the ruined palace. I was cantering forward, when the Khoord called to me to stop; and in another moment I found a precipice of a 1000 feet below me, the wall of the fortress; and such a view in front!

There is one great advantage possessed by the explorer in northern Persia in the summer and autumn months; it is the extreme clearness of the air, which, combined with the height of the mountains, enables one to take observations at incredible distances. Thus the traveller commands an immense range on either side of his route. As an instance of this, I may mention that subsequently, from the top of a high mountain, near Shohan, we not only saw the two hills already mentioned

above Meyomeed at a distance of one hundred miles, but clearly distinguished a conical mountain, well known to travellers on the Meshed road, which lies thirty miles to the south of those hills.

It was a glorious scene that lay stretched before me. Let me try to carry my readers with me, and give an idea of the geography of all this district.

It will be remembered, in looking back to our past route, that between Nishapoor and Meshed we crossed a high range of mountains. This range runs south of Meshed right away to Boognoord, nearly east and west, as do most of the ranges in northern Persia. North of this range runs the broad fertile valley in which lie Shirvan, Koochan, and Meshed, having its watershed a little east of Koochan; the Attrek rising north of this valley near Koochan and flowing west; and the Keshef-rood, which afterwards combines with the Heri-rood, flowing east. North of this valley, again, lies the great range of the Kuren Dagh which we had crossed between Meshed and Kelat, the mountains usually ranging from 8000 to 11,000 feet. This range generally runs from W.N.W. to E.S.E., but sometimes almost N.W. to S.E. Kelat lies at the northern foot of this range, and on a mountain in Kelat I was now standing. Below me, far as the eye could reach, and hundreds of miles beyond the range of vision, lay the great Turkoman plains, the vast salt desert, stretching right away to the Oxus, and then on again to the Sir Darya. To me, looking down upon them from this height, there was something curiously impressive in these extensive deserts, backed by the bold sharp outlines of the Kuren Dagh.

Away to the E.S.E., and about sixty miles off, lay Sarakhs, as clearly visible as if it had been only twenty miles distant. Thence the river Tejend could

be plainly traced by the broad, dark reed-bed that marked its course, running far out into the desert opposite Kelat, at a distance of about forty miles, but drawing slightly nearer to the mountains farther west. And there, out in the desert to the N.N.W., so sharp and clear that one could not believe in the distance, lay Abiverd, now an unoccupied ruin, but once an important town, and to the N.W. were the many villages of Dereguez, looking green and pleasant amidst the great area of sandy waste.

"And there! Look there!" said my guide, pointing E.N.E., "do you not see? There is Merv."

I strained my eyes, and struggled to believe that, on the far dim horizon, I did discern a darker, deeper shade, and that,—that was Merv—or fancy; but somewhere there it lay. And then there came that longing which ever enters the explorer's heart, to penetrate the misty veil, and stand upon the little-known oasis, with its vast and ancient remains of once important cities. I did not then know that this was the nearest point to Merv that we should reach; our advance thwarted, not by difficulties that we could not surmount, but by those created through the intense caution of our own Government.

After I had made my observations, I sat for nearly an hour on that mountain-top in a dreamy reverie. The immense future political importance of the scene which lay at my feet gave it an almost painful and absorbing interest. That great background of mountains, one felt, was the true old frontier of North-Western Persia; and there to the east, again, I saw it running on, and knew that I was looking at Afghanistan with all its wild and thrilling memories. Then, when my mind wandered to the great political problems of the future, and I thought

of British and Russian notes and imaginary difficulties in defining frontier boundaries in these regions, the whole thing seemed a farce, for Nature had drawn a line more clearly than the hand of man could ever fashion it. Those giant mountains formed the outer wall; Tejend and Merv the advance posts; beyond, the sea of desert right away to the Oxus. If Russia had the Oxus, and a line were drawn between it and Merv, what better boundary could be found? But Merv is the outwork of both Khorassan and Afghanistan; and if the outwork falls, Herat will soon fall with it.

My guide awoke me from my reverie, and gave me interesting information as to the country immediately around us. Right along the plain from Dereguez, and away to Sarakhs, we could trace the line of old forts which follows the base of the hills, and marks, as a rule, the farthest point on the plain which the mountain streams reach. These forts are precisely of the character of those described at Budhust, only much larger. Kelat itself lay below us, and we could see at the south-east corner another mountain of equal height to that on which we stood, surrounded also by a high plateau of undulating ground within the fortress; and on that plateau I was told there was a good spring, and a village of 300 houses.

The northern face of the fortress seemed higher than the southern, and in most parts there was a sheer precipice. I thought of our improvements in guns and our pride in their fearful power. How petty it all seemed in face of this great work of Nature! Here was a wall, fashioned by no human hands, which all the artillery of Europe might batter at for a century and never make a visible impression; and then what a garden the interior of the place might be made! The garrison, besides,

could be almost self-supporting, for the land was rich and wanted nothing but man's care and industry.

Care and industry! And below me lay ruin and neglect; roofless mud walls, fields untilled, and poor deserted soldiers dying at their posts.

In a strategical point of view, the possession of Kelat would be of great importance, if it were well garrisoned, although it does not command any very practicable pass through the mountains. But, lying at the foot of the range, it could scarcely be passed by an army marching along the base of the mountains from Kizil Arvat to Sarakhs, unless, by moving away to the Tejend from Dereguez and then following that river. Even then, a force collected here would be within striking distance, and with an impregnable work at its back.

Having made all my observations, we rode down again to our old camping-ground. On the way, the Khoord gave me a long account of a celebrated Turkoman horse that had been captured some time before from a Turkoman chief. A party of Tekès from Merv made an inroad upon the Khoord territory; but the Khoords had already learned, by means of spies, that a *chapaoul*, or raid, was intended, and had mustered in strength to resist it. The Turkoman party therefore found itself cut off by a vastly superior force. Their only hope lay in crossing the mountains; but here again they were waylaid. The chief was riding a high-class Turkoman of great repute for its extraordinary powers of speed and endurance, but in dashing down the hillside he was shot. With its owner still clinging to it, the animal galloped wildly down the mountain, and, falling over the rocks, was captured, but very much cut and bruised. As I was most anxious to see a really high-class Turkoman horse, the chief promised to send for

him, if I would wait a little before starting to rejoin G——. Accordingly, the animal was produced. He was certainly a perfect type of a thoroughbred Turkoman, much resembling an English race-horse in appearance, and standing a little under sixteen hands. I found that it was almost impossible to obtain high-class horses of great repute. Enormous prices are asked for them; but after some trouble I was enabled, through the good offices of Abbas Khan, to purchase this horse; and now, after marching some thousands of miles, and going through many adventures, he is in England safe and well, and likely to prove of immense value in giving a strain of extraordinary stoutness to our thoroughbred stock. He is the first and only thoroughbred Turkoman that ever has reached this country.

The Turkomans value their horses exclusively by their performances, and they put them to extreme tests.

CHAPTER XII.

The Turkomans and the Persians.

And here let me give an account of the extraordinary people against whom for some weeks we were now to keep watch and ward by day and by night.

The Turkomans occupy the country between Khiva, the Oxus, and the North Persian frontier, and are divided into many tribes; but the principal of these inhabit the south of this great tract, viz., the Yamouts, the Goklans, and the Tekès. The Yamouts occupy the shores of the Caspian, and are, as has been mentioned, water as well as land pirates. They are supposed to number about 40,000 tents. The Goklans occupy the country of the upper Gourgan, the Attrek, and Simbur, and number about 12,000 tents. The Tekès are divided into two bodies; the Akhal Tekès, who live on the northern slopes of the Kuren Dagh mountains, and at Tejend; and the Merv Tekès, who inhabit the great oasis of Merv, and the banks of the Moorghab river. Each of these bodies numbers about 30,000 tents; and each Turkoman tent on an average turns out a mounted horseman. The number of men available for the field may therefore be easily calculated.

The Turkomans are a Turkish race, and speak a dialect

of Turkish, and they hold the Sonnie faith. In person they are muscular, heavy-limbed men, with large hands, rather flat, broad faces, and small eyes; thus showing much of the Tartar type. There is generally a merry, cunning twinkle about their eyes which does not give the idea of a hard, cold-blooded race. It is difficult to define the Turkoman government, as they are nearly the only people in the world who really appear to rule themselves. In each village there is usually, however, one man, or *Aksakal,* who takes the lead, and whose advice or command is generally followed; and amongst the Tekès the threatening of danger has brought a real leader to the surface in the person of Kourschid Khan, a man much respected for his bravery and general character, but who holds a very uncertain position.

The Turkomans seem to be ruled by an unwritten law or tradition. Certainly they live under the very essence of a Republic; the *mollahs,* or priests, have no doubt a considerable influence; but tribal feeling appears to be the leading sentiment or law which regulates the political state of these strange and barbarous people.

That the Turkoman type should still be so distinctly marked is very curious, as they constantly capture Persian girls, who become their wives, and so must bring a strong infusion of Persian blood into the race; but it is not traceable either in their appearance or in their habits. The peculiar characteristic of the Turkomans is their bold, independent air. Their domestic habits are simple in the extreme. They have rarely more than one wife; and the women have great latitude accorded to them. They are never veiled, as in most other Mahomedan countries, and they occupy themselves thoroughly with the domestic concerns of their

lords. The latter, when not engaged in predatory expeditions, lead a most indolent life; looking after their horses, smoking, and gossiping being their usual occupations. The care of the flocks and herds, as well as the execution of a little agriculture being entrusted to the boys and women. These last lead an active life, and much of their spare time is devoted to weaving the carpets, which are the only articles of luxury allowed in the tents. These tents have been already described; and it is the province of the women to strike and pack them whenever a move is contemplated. The men wear the long brown woollen or cotton dress that is common both with the Khoords and Usbegs; but both men and women often wear a red silk or cotton shirt beneath. The former wear the usual black or brown sheepskin cap, but it is generally smaller and lower than those worn in Persia. The ladies on gala occasions indulge in considerable finery. Their head-dresses are then most elaborate, the hair being plaited and arranged into most fantastic shapes; and they delight in high red or yellow boots, and adorn themselves with numberless trinkets.

The diet of the Turkomans is most frugal. A little millet and milk forms the staple food, and they move their camps from place to place as the season renders it convenient for getting pasture for their flocks, or raising the small grain crops that suffice for their needs.

Their manners are coarse and rough, presenting a great contrast to the polish of the Persians; but, on the other hand, they are manly, brave, and enduring. Their reputation for hospitality is widely known. They are brought up, however, from childhood to consider that violent robbery is the highest of virtues, and every growing youth looks forward to the day when he may

win his spurs by joining in a *chapaoul*, or raid. But, if the Turkomans are lazy in their habits and careless of their wives, there is one thing to which their whole attention is devoted—their horses. And well do these noble animals deserve all the care that is lavished upon them, for in courage, speed and endurance combined, they stand at the head of the equine race.

Now, what is the Turkoman horse? It is probable that the race dates back originally, like our own thorough-bred, to the Arab. But the race is now distinct; and, besides being so much larger, they far excel the Arabs both in speed and endurance. It is reported that Tamerlane brought upwards of 14,000 of the best Arab mares into this country, and both Shah Abbas and Nadir Shah also imported many Nedjedeh mares. In appearance they more nearly resemble the English thoroughbred or race-horse than any other type, and average about the same height, perhaps, if anything, standing a little higher. I have heard them described in India as having large, coarse, plain heads; but those are Afghan horses, and not true thorough-bred Turkomans. I have seen them with very good action, but this is usually spoilt by the custom of tying the hind and fore leg of the colt on each side together, in order to make them "tripple" or walk "disconnected" at the fast easy pace in which a Turkoman delights. It is at this pace, about five miles an hour, that they do their long, slow journeys, while the quick raids are made at a slow gallop.

There can be no doubt that the pasturage of the Turkoman steppes is peculiarly favourable to the development of the horse. In the spring these animals are generally fed on green food, but afterwards on barley, chopped straw, and clover-hay. They are most carefully clothed,

but stand in the open air. The care that the Turkoman takes in clothing his horse when not in work is most singular. They have thick felt coverings made, both as hoods and rugs completely enveloping the whole body. It is generally supposed that the Turkoman horse has no mane; but this is a mistake. The fact is, that the thick, heavy hoods wear away the mane, and prevent its free growth, and then the Turkoman trims or hogs it, as we should say.* Just as the squire in olden days followed on a humbler animal bearing his knight's helmet, so a high-class Turkoman is nearly always followed by a yaboo, or pony, carrying his heavy clothing.

Every horse is carefully tested, and his quality is exactly known by the tribe; and a horse of extreme merit is most closely guarded, and never sold except for a very large sum. They are raced over long distances, extending to as much as forty and fifty miles; but they also have shorter races of five or six miles to test speed. The horses are sedulously prepared before being thus tried. Of course, all the horses in the Turkoman country are not of high quality, and good hardy, useful animals, averaging about 15.2 in height, can be purchased for from 15*l.* to 20*l.*, whereas a very high-class horse will sometimes fetch between 400*l.* and 500*l.*, or even more. The Turkoman is quite as gentle as the Arab, and generally more quiet and sedate in his ways and habits, whilst equally courageous.

That they would prove as fast as the best English race-horses for very short distances, it is difficult to believe, for they have not been bred wholly for speed; but there is no reason to doubt that they would hold their own in our long races. Their stamina and general

* The horse I brought to England had no mane, but since his arrival it has grown freely.

powers of endurance are certainly far in excess of those of the British thoroughbred horse. It is melancholy for any one who knows how our Indian cavalry are mounted, to think that within easy reach there lies this splendid field for the purchase of the finest animals in the world, but which we persistently refuse to develope; it would interfere with the Indian studs and their vested rights, which produce very bad animals at a ruinous cost.

The whole pride of a Turkoman consists in a reputation for bravery, cunning, and endurance, earned in their numerous *chapaouls*. M. Ferrier, a Frenchman well acquainted with Central Asia, gives such a vivid description of the preparation for, and the execution of, one of these raids, that I prefer quoting his very words:—

"The rapidity with which the Turkomans accomplish great distances on their pillaging excursions is really inconceivable. The following is the manner in which they prepare for them. When a chief is determined upon making a foray, he plants his lance, surmounted by his colours, into the ground in front of his tent, and a crier invites all good Mussulmans in the name of the Prophet to range themselves under his banner, and join in the raid upon the Persian infidels. His wishes, however, are no law to any of the tribe, for the Turkoman enjoys the most perfect liberty; and those only who have confidence in their chief ride up and strike their lances into the ground near his, the signal that the volunteer has decided to follow his fortunes. When the chief thinks that he has assembled a sufficient number of men to insure the success of the expedition, he names that day month as the day of departure, this time being required for each man to get his horse into that high state of condition without which he could not support

the extraordinary fatigue and hardships he has to undergo. During this month the forage of a horse for twenty-four hours consists of six pounds of hay, or clover hay, and about three pounds of barley, or one half the ordinary quantity of corn. This reduces the animal considerably in flesh; which is the object in view, the first step in his training. His pace improves under it, and he is thus prepared for the strengthening and somewhat singular food which he is subsequently to have. The horse is then put to his full speed for half an hour every day, and is not fed until some considerable time after he comes in. Very little water is given him, and, if he is eager to drink, it is a sign that he ought to fast a little longer; but this training never exceeds a month. The thirty days having elapsed, the Turkomans take the field, each of them with two horses; the one, the charger which has been trained in the manner described, the other, a *yaboo,* or inferior animal used for burden, which the Turkoman mounts on leaving his *aoul* (encampment), and which carries him to the Persian territory. This follows him without saddle or bridle, and never strays from the party, for both have been accustomed to follow their master like dogs from the time they were foals. The first day's march seldom exceeds three parasangs;* the second, four; the third, five; and the fourth, six. When they arrive at this point, the Turkomans change the forage of the charger, and substitute four pounds and a quarter of barley-flour, two pounds of maize-flour, and two pounds of raw sheep's-tail fat, chopped very fine, all well mixed and kneaded together. This is one day's ration, without either straw or hay. The horses are very fond of this food, which is given them in balls, and puts them in tip-top condition; and

* 13¼ miles.

after having been fed in this manner for four days they are capable of supporting the longest forced marches. Then, and not till then, their masters mount them, and prepare for the work of pillage.

"Previously to this, however, they look for some hiding-place fortified by Nature, which will furnish them with a secure retreat under adverse eventualities. While they are quietly resting themselves and their horses here, three or four are detached from the band to ascertain, if possible, whether any caravans are likely to pass. Sometimes these scouts will join the *kafila* in the guise of inoffensive travellers; and, as they go along, they take very good care to find out the nature and value of the merchandise, and the number of armed men; after which, suddenly disappearing, they convey this information to their companions. Though the Turkomans do not run much risk in such *reconnaissances*, they prefer, for prudence' sake, to obtain this information from Persians living in the frontier villages, with whom they are frequently in communication, and pay accordingly. These vagabonds, who, without an idea of pity, thus deliver up their unfortunate countrymen to these bandits, explore the roads and give intelligence, which is generally but too accurate. During the time thus occupied in reconnoitring, the main body of the Turkomans that remain concealed are not inactive. The majority scour the immediate neighbourhood in small parties of five or six; and, as their numbers do not attract attention, they frequently manage to carry off some of the peasants working in the fields. This is the ordinary prelude to operations on a large scale. In the evening they rejoin their friends to hear the news from their scouts, and deliberate upon their plans for the morrow.

"When the attack is at length decided upon, half-a-

dozen men are selected by the chief to remain with the provisions and yaboos; the rest, mounted on their best horses, gallop quickly to the appointed spot, whether village or caravan, upon either of which they fall like a whirlwind, and which they devastate in like manner; finally sweeping up and carrying off everything, including men, women, and children, that comes in their way. In a few minutes all is over. Incendiarism is not unfrequently their last act; and, leaving the flames and smoke to tell the tale of desolation to the distant villages, they fly with their booty, and gain the spot where they left their horses, putting from thirty to forty parasangs behind them without drawing bit, and in an incredibly short space of time reach their encampment.* Their horses, accustomed to these long and rapid journeys, accomplish them without knocking up; but this is not the case with the unhappy persons who have been kidnapped. These, if few in number, are generally taken up behind their captors; or, if more numerous, they tie them on the horses they have stolen, and drive them before them until the animals drop with fatigue. The unhappy prisoners they carried are then attached by a long cord to the saddle-bows of their brutal tormentors, who drag them along, sometimes walking, sometimes running, according to the pace at which their own horses are going at the time. Woe to those who slacken their pace! For directly any show symptoms of fatigue, the head of the Turkoman's lance pricks and forces them on to further exertion; and should they fall through nature giving way entirely, they are killed without remorse.

"Of one hundred Persians thus carried off and obliged to march with their captors, scarcely a third reach

* A parasang is 4½ miles.

Turkestan, or at any rate the spot whence the party set out on their villainous expedition. A Turkoman's sensibility is never awakened to suffering, no matter how terrible—the sentiment of pity is unknown to them. A Persian in their eyes is simply a mercantile and marketable commodity, and not worth taking care of after it has been injured. They are merciless by habit and by calculation. A prisoner who could make his escape would never forget the treatment he had received at their hands, and would certainly take his revenge by giving information at the first military post he came to. In killing his captive, therefore, a Turkoman looks upon the act as one of self-defence."

I can most fully endorse M. Ferrier's views. The boldness of these people may be conceived, when we remember that they often enter Persian territory for a distance of 200 miles, trusting to their own cunning and to the endurance of their horses to make their way back in safety. But it is evident that this would be impossible, were there any honest desire on the part of the Persian Government to resist these inroads. The Turkoman's first onset is made with the greatest *élan*; but they rarely or never attack more than twice. They have a proverb which says, "Try twice; then back the third time." That, under European officers, they would make the finest irregular cavalry in the world, there can be little doubt. The war in which, a few years ago, less than 5000 of the Merv Turkomans utterly defeated a Persian regular army of nearly 20,000 men, taking most of its guns, and the desperate attacks made upon a force of Russian infantry after the recent occupation of Khiva, prove that they only require organization and direction to make them most formidable enemies.

The Persians are of the Shiah sect of Mahomedans, whilst the Turkomans are Sonnies. Without entering upon any lengthened disquisition on the difference of creeds held by these two sections of the Mahomedan faith, a short explanation may be interesting to those who have only a limited knowledge of the East.

When Mahomet died, the choice of a successor became difficult. Abou Bekr, Omar, Othman, and Ali, his most faithful followers, all had claims. Ali had married Fatima, the daughter of Mahomet, by whom he had two sons, Hassan and Hoosein, the only lineal descendants of the Prophet; and of these four claimants Ali was by far the greatest warrior. But the choice fell on the venerable Abou Bekr, who, carrying out the views of Mahomet, immediately commenced that extraordinary career of conquest and proselytism by the sword, which was consummated and consolidated by his successor, the high-minded and far-seeing Omar. On the death of Omar, the Kaliphate fell into the weak hands of Othman, and only on his assassination did Ali succeed. But the weakness of Othman had already sown the seeds of disunion in the new faith; and Ali, more of a soldier than a statesman, was quite unable to guide the unruly and unwieldy power which so suddenly threatened to submerge the world. On the assassination of Ali, Hassan succeeded to the Kaliphate; but soon shunned the dangerous leadership, and abdicated. Hoosein perished in a vain attempt to sustain the hereditary principle. But the followers of the direct branch did not fall away, and a sectarian difference isolated them more completely from the majority of the Mahomedan converts. For a difference of belief had already crept in. Whilst the followers of Ali made the Koran, as written by the Prophet, the standard of their

faith, the majority accepted the sayings and reported wishes of Mahomet as an unwritten law, and compiled these sayings into articles of belief.

Thus the Shiahs, or followers of Ali, soon became separated by bitter sectarian differences from the Sonnies, or acceptors of the more extended doctrines which were firmly upheld by the succeeding Caliphs.

As usual, these differences created a greater animosity than that existing between the Mahomedans and the holders of some different faiths. In fact, the more enlightened Mahomedans are usually surprised to find how few of their tenets are violated by the Protestant belief. There can be no doubt that Mahomet derived the foundation of the faith which he inculcated from the Nestorian Christians, and he fully acknowledged Christ, or Isa, as one of the holiest of the prophets, though denying his Divine origin. But the great principle of Mahomedanism lay in the abolition of the worship of idols, then so prevalent. They cannot now make nice distinctions between the real and the ideal, and hold that the Roman Catholics actually worship the figures of our Saviour and the Virgin, to which they bow. But when the principles of the Christian faith are fully understood, they often show themselves very tolerant. A mere traveller should content himself with thoroughly explaining those general principles; and urging the divine precepts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as applied to religious differences. To enter upon argument beyond this point can serve no right or useful end, and only leads to embittered feeling.

CHAPTER XIII.

Igdalik—Laim—Chepishli—Dereguez.

It had been arranged that an escort of a dozen men were to remain behind to accompany me to our new camp, but only three were forthcoming. The first part of our way to Dereguez being through the mountains, we were told that there was no great chance of meeting Turkomans, though we could not be assured of safety. In fact, we were warned that from this moment we must never consider ourselves safe, but march with every military precaution, having our arms ready for use at a moment's notice. The Governor of Kelat was absent with the greater number of irregular horsemen; and therefore, instead of taking the lower road across the plain, where Turkomans are always lurking, we took the upper, though much longer, route through the low mountains. After riding about eight miles, I came across a beautiful stream running down into the plains, and on this stream a few miles below lay the large village of Igdalik. Four miles farther on there was another rivulet, and about eighteen miles from Kelat I came upon G—— and the camp, pitched just outside the village of Idalek, which lies on a pretty little mountain stream in a very rich valley.

Only those who have travelled long and far in Persia can imagine how refreshing it is to come across a plentiful supply of good water at every few miles; and this is the character of the entire northern slope of the Kuren Dagh range. What a splendid country this would be under settled rule! But Persia seems to take no trouble in maintaining her frontier. Unless some action is taken it appears likely soon to lapse into Russian hands, and will thus give them a perfectly level, rich, and well-watered highway from the Caspian to Herat, with forts that only want occupying along the entire line. Yet we seem ready to allow this part of Persia to pass away from her without a remonstrance; and so defective is our topographical knowledge, that we scarcely realize that this *is* Persia, and arguments upon the point are common in the daily papers between disputants on Central Asian affairs. No European foot had ever before passed along this route, and no Russian had ever penetrated here. There is an intense pleasure in feeling that you have got to entirely new ground. This pleasure was greatly enhanced when we hurried to our maps that we had brought from England,—the very latest productions of the Topographical Department, supposed to be secret treasures, and upon which our diplomatic arrangements with the Russian Government were being made,—and found that they were utterly useless, giving no idea whatever of the geographical features of the country. So entirely incorrect were they, that we threw them on one side. They gave us no guidance whatever, and were simply misleading at every step. And yet we wonder that we have boundary questions constantly to refer to arbitration, which are invariably decided against us!

G—— was most careful and hard-working in his

observations, and for many hundreds of miles never missed an angle in the road we followed, ever marching on, compass and note-book in hand. Notwithstanding the rumours of Turkomans, we slept outside the walls of the village, which, of course, like all others in this country, is a fort, and the gates were carefully closed at sundown. We had nine *sowars* and four "shooting men," as Shaab invariably called our infantry escort. These were not regular soldiers, but villagers armed with rifles, and usually excellent shots.

The next day we marched to Laim (sixteen miles) through the mountains. We had scouts out to the front, and advanced ready for an immediate fight. About seven miles from Idalek, we passed another beautiful mountain stream; we found Laim a wretched ruined village, but a fine mountain river ran dashing past into the plains. This is the river that waters Abiverd. Availing ourselves of a small grove of large trees outside the village, we pitched our tent here. Walking up the stream for about half a mile until it came foaming down through a cleft in the mountains, I was making my way back, when a bird rose a few paces from me. I could scarcely believe my eyes, for if not a woodcock, it was the ghost of one; yet we had never heard of this bird in eastern Persia. G—— was quite incredulous when told about it. Unfortunately, I had only a rifle with me.

October 15th.—We knew we had a long march before us to Chepishli, in the district of Dereguez; but our guides varied much in their estimates; so we started very early and kept ascending the mountains until we were 7000 feet above the sea. The mountain-slopes, instead of being barren, as in most parts of Persia, were covered with grass and thickly sprinkled with juniper-trees, which imparted to the whole country a cheerful

appearance after the desolation to which we had been so long accustomed; and this feature continued right along these northern slopes of the Kuren Dagh.

Descending rapidly, we reached a point beyond which we were told it would be folly to proceed without increasing our escort; accordingly, our guide was despatched to an adjacent village to procure more armed men, and we halted for breakfast by the side of a nice stream. Just after halting we flushed two unmistakable woodcocks, and I cried out in triumph to G——. We marked them down at only a few hundred yards off; and taking my gun, I knocked them both over, but lost one in some reeds. The bird we found was beautiful, with the most splendid plumage, rather darker than our English woodcock, and very large. The villagers told us that they were not uncommon along the banks of these mountain streams, but we never saw any again. Soon a whole posse of the wildest-looking mountaineers appeared on foot, armed with very long small-bore rifles, with an immense amount of metal, and they offered to come as escort. But we now heard there were two roads, one by the mountains and one by the plains; the latter being reported to be much the shorter, but very dangerous, as Turkomans were always lurking in the vicinity of a river that we should have to cross. We had already come nine miles, and even by the latter road it was thirty-four miles further to Chepishli, and no village along the whole way. I decided for the lower road; and having, through Shaab, addressed our escort, and endeavoured to excite their warlike ardour in case of accidents, we pushed on, following the course of the stream. We soon reached the base of the main range, and struck into the hills or small mountains which, in the province of Dereguez, jut right out into

the plains. But, as we approached these plains and the dreaded river, a change came over the spirit of our little force. In other words, they funked shamefully, and eventually came to a halt, declaring we should all be cut up by the Turkomans if we went any farther, and distinctly declining to advance a step. It was in vain I urged that we could beat off a very respectable force of Turkomans, and showed them my breech-loading rifle. They did not intend risking themselves, and, having escorted us whilst there was scarcely any danger, deliberately turned back when we wanted their services. Nor was this all. The worst of it was that our former escort, only fifteen strong, did not like going on alone. However, I assured them we were so well armed that we ought to hold our own, and I think my little "Express" rifle decided them. Our servants talked about it to such an extent that the rumour preceded us wherever we went; the general opinion of the villagers being that it would go on firing all day without loading, and could kill men at the rate of about thirty a minute.

These fifteen men were really good fellows, and promises of high pay, backed by their faith in the "Express," carried the day. At last we reached the river, the largest stream we had encountered since leaving Kelat. It wound down a broad open valley, which we scouted well before descending from the hills. The scouts reported that a party of about sixty Turkomans had been at the river in the morning, but there were no signs of them now. Still the general impression was that we should be specially waylaid both on account of our valuable luggage, and the considerable amount of money that we were known to carry with us, and also in the hope of getting an enormous ransom. This ransom, we were told, had already been estimated

at 400,000*l.* It appeared that a French photographer, who accompanied the Persian army in its advance to Merv a few years before, had been captured by the Turkomans, and on the decided application of the French Government he was ransomed for no less a sum than 10,000*l.*

"Surely," they reasoned, "if a little Frenchman travelling about to take pictures is worth 10,000*l.*, two English officers might be worth 400,000*l.*;" and to that sum they stuck. I impressed upon them, however, that we did not intend to be taken alive, that we should be very valueless dead, and that the breech-loaders would probably account for a good many Turkomans first. I must confess I was uneasy about our baggage, for to defend a long train of mules with so small a party would be difficult. We halted at the river to water our horses, and, as usual, the escort adopted the custom generally prevalent among the Turkomans and Khoords, of galloping about directly after they had watered them. They declared that otherwise they would have the gripes. We always followed our English ideas, and our steeds never suffered as they predicted.

Leaving this river, which winds down into the desert, and then, running to the left, waters Suran, Khosroabad, and other frontier villages of Dereguez, we entered some low hills, just the sort of places that the Turkomans delight in. Our men were the best scouts that we had yet met with; but it was now getting dark and the mules came on but slowly. Moreover, the wretched mule-bells rang out in the night air, telling our whereabouts to anyone within two or three miles. Then, when it got quite dark, the scouts were useless; so we drew them in and advanced altogether with the mules. Our guides lost their way and got off the track,

but we managed to keep the right direction, and the country was open. The journey seemed interminable, and it was not until half-past nine that we joyfully welcomed the walls of Chepishli; and making our way through the narrow streets of a considerable and, of course, fortified town, we were safely deposited in a house that had been prepared for our reception.

There is no doubt we had run a very great risk, and given the Turkomans a chance which we never gave them again; but we had drifted into the difficulty through the cowardice of the infantry escort. I was not going to turn back, for it would have had a bad moral effect; and we did not intend to let them believe that Englishmen could be stopped by such a danger. I am inclined to think that the Russian advance to Khiva, and the antagonism which is supposed to exist between the English and Russians, helped us materially, for there was an impression that we might have come to promise English support, and, they were no doubt careful not to lose a possible friend by attacking two officers who might in their opinion be envoys. The report of the kindness I had shown to the Turkoman prisoners would also spread over the whole country. No doubt all this assisted us, for a well-planned attack from about a hundred Turkomans would have most likely succeeded.

Early the next morning we were visited by the brother of the Governor of Dereguez. And here let me state that Dereguez, instead of being a town, as marked on all old maps, is a province containing more than a hundred villages, the chief town being Mahomed-ábad, nine miles distant from Chepishli. This town, together with Nowhandan and many villages, lies on a plain at the foot of the main range, surrounded

by small mountains which separate it from the desert; and beyond these mountains and on the verge of the desert, lie important forts, such as Khosroabad, Suran, and many others. In the middle of this plain there is a spring, but the main water-supply is derived from a rapid river which descends from the Kuren Dagh range near Duringa, and then waters several villages and also the towns on the plains. In tracing Persian rivers on the map, the student must ever remember that, through the water being taken for irrigation, they usually become less and less after they leave the mountains, and are eventually so expended.

Dereguez certainly has a more verdant well-to-do aspect than any Persian province that I have seen except Gilan and Mazanderan, where Nature has done everything, but man nothing. Even the face of the great mountains has a freshness not seen from the southern side. The people are Khoords. They have been ruled by the same family for 150 years, and there is a manliness about them, combined with a degree of order and cleanliness, that is quite unusual in Persia. In case of emergency, Dereguez can turn out about a thousand mounted men, and about 3000 armed infantry mountaineers could be assembled from the different villages. They, however, would be merely armed men, without the slightest discipline or organization, but useful in defending their own walled villages. In fact, infantry are never considered in these countries; cavalry only are thought of any importance. How they will rue the mistake when they some day come across good regular infantry on those great plains!

The Governor's brother was riding a fine grey Turkoman, well over sixteen hands in height, a bony thoroughbred horse which, as we were told, had a great reputa-

tion. I was astonished at the size of the horses generally. They were quite as high as English horses, but rather narrow; and nearly all thoroughbred.

A body of a hundred men had come to take us to Mahomedabad. We did not start until the afternoon, and were much amused by some of our escort. One man would go off at full gallop, and another would chase him. Then they would fire at each other, and go through all the phases of a mimic fight; a rough-looking set of men, but every now and then one came across the *beau ideal* of an irregular horseman. They had no idea of order nor any kind of drill, but simply swarmed after their chief, quite independently. If properly organized and officered, they would make very formidable cavalry, for they all ride well—in fact, may be said to live on horseback. They were usually armed with a double-barrelled gun or rifle and a sabre; and sometimes with pistols in addition.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mahomedabad—The Rood Bar—Skirgau.

MAHOMEDABAD was a large walled town, at the gates of which we were received by the farashes of the Governor. We passed down the main street through the bazaar, and were much struck by the extraordinary difference between the people and those of other towns we had visited. There was a well-to-do air about everything that showed good government at a glance. A chief brought a most civil message from the Governor, telling us that a house had been prepared for us, but requesting that we would come and pay him a visit at once, and take tea with him. I apologised for our dusty state, but he begged earnestly that we would not consider this.

In front of the Governor's palace was a large court-yard, picketed in the middle of which was a magnificent Turkoman horse of a dun colour, but quite thoroughbred and standing nearly seventeen hands high. He was an enormous animal, with great power and perfect shape, but unfortunately he had slightly broken knees. There was also a tame moufflon walking about. The Governor, Alayar Khan, we found to be a man of middle age and very prepossessing manners. Nothing could exceed his

civility, and there was a genial air of truth and good nature about him which we were not accustomed to, and which further acquaintance did not belie. He was full of schemes for the general improvement of his province, and for the discomfiture of predatory Turkomans. Of course he reverted to politics, on which subject his remarks were true and sensible. On the way to our house we passed a large tank constructed for the purpose of storing a supply of water for the town in the event of its being surrounded by Turkomans and the outer supply cut off.

"I am shut out by the mountains," said the Governor, "and have 30,000 Turkomans within two days' ride of me; therefore I am obliged to take every precaution."

We had not been long installed when a messenger arrived to request that information might be furnished of all our requirements, and to intimate that on no account were we to be allowed to purchase any articles of food, as the chief wished to provide everything during our stay. And we found this was no mere empty form. I took the greatest care, however, that this generosity should not be abused by our servants, a very necessary precaution, as Persian servants invariably exact and rob in the name of their masters.

October 17th.—We had a quiet day's rest, but, being still most anxious to push on to Merv if it were possible after we had paid a short visit here, I had a long consultation with Abbas Khan on the subject. He advised me to write a letter to Kourschid Khan, the chief of the Tekès, asking him to send some one who could escort us. Abbas Khan thought that any effort to reach Merv without Kourschid's sanction, and without a special order from our own Government to go there, would be hopeless;

but he promised to speak to Alayar Khan, in whom he had great confidence, and to request him to send a messenger with a letter to Kourschid Khan.

G——'s leg was still troublesome, and he wisely determined to lay up whilst we stayed here.

October 18th.—In the morning we had a visit from a curious personage, one Mollah Saduk, a sort of fool or jester to the Governor, but, like some of the jesters of old, with a considerable fund of shrewdness hidden beneath his nonsense. He seemed quite a character, and had, I was told, no little influence. He came to say that, if we would allow it, Alayar Khan would breakfast with us that morning, that is to say, that he the Governor would send breakfast, but that it would give him the opportunity of meeting us in a friendly manner. We replied that we should be delighted; accordingly he arrived in a short time with some of his chief retainers, Mollah Saduk amongst the number. Abbas Khan, who was very proud of being able to use a knife and fork like an Englishman, expatiated on the merits of our system, as contrasted with the Persian plan of always eating with the fingers.

We found the Governor and his party most friendly and amusing, and they gave us much information relative to the place and country. We now discovered why the Governor of Khorassan was unwilling that we should visit Dereguez. The political relations between himself and our host were on the most critical footing. They had long, it appeared, been upon bad terms, owing to the circumstance that Alayar Khan, who was rather independent, would not rob his people to pay the accustomed presents which the Persian governors usually wring from those under them. Things had at last got to such a pitch that he had been ordered to present

himself at Meshed. Knowing full well the dangerous import of this order, on one pretence or another he omitted to go. He had just heard that Hussein Khan had assembled a force and was about to march to Dereguez. This was the force we had seen at Meshed, and we now discovered that the contemplated visit to Sarakhs was only a pretence, and that Dereguez was the real point of movement. Alayar Khan, in great distress, had made overtures to the Governor of Koochan, who had promised his aid. He was also on good terms with some of the Tekè Turkomans, who were ready to support him. So here was a very pretty little civil war apparently about to burst out, and I much feared that it would rather interfere with our explorations.

I had to be most diplomatic, as the chief would ask my advice upon certain points, and I was determined not to be mixed up in any of these quarrels. We had a very long talk with him about Merv. He told me that he would send us on with some friendly Turkomans if we only had an order from our own Government to go there; but that without that it would be impossible for him to take the responsibility.

"If anything happened to you," he said, "I should be held responsible for it, and be compelled to pay the ransom if you were taken prisoners; whereas, if you had an order from your Government, it would of course absolve me from risk."

He advised me to write to Kourschid Khan, and, having procured a Turkoman to carry the letter, I sent him off at once to Merv.

Alayar Khan was a great sportsman. He cast longing eyes at my little Express rifle, and I felt that it would have to be given to him. Unfortunately there were rather less than one hundred rounds of ammunition left

for it, but one could see that his heart was set upon it. Its fame, as usual, had gone before us. This giving of presents was a great tax. All other English travellers in this part of the world had been sent on special Government service, and the presents were given by Government; but G—— and I had either to pay the penalty ourselves, or else to discredit the English name for liberality, which of course we would not do. Valuable rifles and Purdey guns had therefore to be parted with, which made the pursuit of geographical information rather an expensive process. I was very loth to part with my Express, as we had still a long journey before us, and it was my pet rifle; but Alayar Khan was so truly civil, and anxious to do his best for us in every way, that I felt it must be done.

We had a very amusing breakfast. There was a most benevolent looking old Khan in attendance, who, we heard, was trying to patch up the quarrel with the Governor of Khorassan; and Mollah Saduk went through all sorts of grotesque tricks which afforded great amusement to everybody, but which seemed to me rather coarse than witty. Naturally the conversation became political, as is always the case in the East. The Governor asked me to ride out with him in the afternoon, and take tea in his gardens a little way outside the city. As we passed through the town I could not help being struck by the respect and evident affection shown to him by the people generally. The gardens were rather pretty, and there was a kiosque in the centre, from which a fine view of the surrounding country could be obtained. It was evidently the great delight of the chief to ascend this kiosque and glory in his inheritance; and, with the exception of the wooded countries of Gilan and Mazanderan, this was certainly

the pleasantest district we had visited. We sent for our field-glasses and telescopes, and Alayar Khan enjoyed explaining the general topography. He seemed thoroughly to enter into our wish for more extended geographical information, and was most ready to supply it. From this position we commanded a very extensive view.

To the south, about fifteen miles away, lay the great range of the Kuren Dagh; these mountains, unlike the usual barren hills of Persia, having a distinctly green hue, and being thinly sprinkled with juniper-trees. All around us extended a great plain dotted with many villages. The gardens near Mahomedabad were of considerable extent; and away to the west lay the town of Nowhandan, with still more extensive vineyards and gardens. I had asked Abbas Khan whether wine was ever made, and soon found that these Khoord chiefs were not strict observers of the Koran in vinous respects. Away to the north, and only about ten miles distant, lay another long range of low mountains separating these plains from the great salt desert. The hills seemed to join the main range both to the east and to the west, thus inclosing the district within a semicircle. On the lower hills, nearest to us, Alayar Khan pointed out watch-towers in different directions, from which information was immediately given of the approach of any roving parties of Turkomans. The plain was dotted with the little circular towers which are to be found around every town and village within reach of Turkoman forays. These small mud towers, of about fifteen feet in height, are only entered by a hole through which a man can just creep on all fours, and are distributed about in immense numbers; sometimes over a hundred may be counted in the vicinity of one town.

To these the shepherds or husbandmen run if Turkomans suddenly appear; and as the Khoords are usually armed, and the process of entering in the presence of an armed man would be decidedly unpleasant, they are generally safe for a time, and remain until their enemies have absconded.

Alayar Khan explained to me that there were many villages both amongst the low surrounding mountains, and even at their northern foot, on the great salt plains. I was very anxious to visit Abiverd, and made inquiries about it. "It is not now occupied," he said, "although it was once a large and important town. I sometimes send a small force from here at certain seasons of the year, and occasionally the Turkomans come and occupy it for a time if we are not there, for there are considerable gardens still left. We will go down to that neighbourhood," he continued, "in a few days; and, if you are fond of sport, you shall see how many pheasants and partridges we will get." He explained that the pheasants were found in the great reed-beds which usually mark the spots where the mountain streams run into the desert and are absorbed by it. Some of these, especially that where the Tejend terminates, are of immense extent. Wild boar and tigers, he told me, were also found in them; the former in great numbers: but to go down to these places required a considerable escort, as they were close to the Tekè Turkomans on the Tejend, and to those at Annau and Askabat. He promised, however, to accompany me in the course of a few days with an escort of seven or eight hundred mounted men.

He then began a long political conversation, as usual, relative to England and Russia; and some of his remarks were most shrewd.

"We hear," observed he, "that England is no longer

the power she used to be; that you have got great riches and think of nothing else, but that you never fight now."

"If we do not fight," I explained, "it is not from any loss of power; but we have sufficient territory, and instead of trying to conquer more, we are endeavouring, by means of railways, roads, and general improvement, to make the most of the Great Empire reigned over by Her Majesty."

"But if you are so strong," he rejoined, "and if you can still fight, why did you the other day pay tribute to America?"

To explain the Alabama Indemnity to a fighting Khoord chief, through Shaab as interpreter, was no easy matter; still I did my best, and ended by saying that we lived on an island, and were so strong at sea that we had nothing to fear from anyone.

"But India is not an island," he remarked. "Do you intend to give that up to the Russians without fighting? Perhaps the Russians will not take tribute."

"The Russians are a long way off," I interposed; "and, as you know, there are great steppes between difficult to march over."

"Yes," was the reply; "ten years ago the Russians were a long way off this place; but where are they now? They are at Samarcand; they have taken Khokand;* and Bokhara is really theirs whenever they like to take it. Then, we heard that England had told them they must not take Khiva; but they took it. Now they are on the Oxus. They have been to Kizil Arvat, at the foot of these very mountains, and have burnt it. Soon they will come to Merv; and two or three years after that, they will be at Herat. Do you think all

* They always persisted that all Khokand was virtually Russian. It has since been annexed.

the people you have conquered in Hindostan will be as quiet as they are now when Russia is at Herat? And how can you prevent her?" he asked. "Your fleet cannot come to Herat. Of what use will it be to you when you have to fight with Russia for India?"

I told him of the immense population of the British Empire, and of our great wealth, which would have its effect if a struggle ever came.

"But you have no army," he urged; "at least, so we hear. It is said, that where you have one man Russia has six. How can one man stand against six? And, if you really have great riches and plenty of men, why have you no army?"

I found we were getting on to difficult ground, and endeavoured to use the views of the extreme British school of optimists; but although these may pacify John Bull, the Khoord chief knew too much of the East to be misled by cloudy phrases, and I had to divert the conversation to other topics.

Alayar Khan was really a very shrewd, well-informed man, with an amount of clear common sense and an absence of prejudice rarely found in the East. He asked me what I thought of the horses and men composing his escort. I replied that the men seemed excellent horsemen, and remarkably well mounted; but that they would be improved by a little drill, as from their independent mode of action they would prove rather unmanageable in large numbers.

"That is just what they require," he exclaimed. "Under English or Russian officers they would make first-rate cavalry; but I have nobody who can drill them, and they do as they choose. I have my several captains, who each command 100 men; but these bodies do not move with any sort of order, as you observe. They never will

do so unless they have English or Russian officers to teach them."

"There would also be a difficulty," I said, "in time of war from the fact of each man having a different fire-arm, and no regular supply of powder or ball."

"We make very good powder," he replied; "and there is plenty of lead in the country; but, as you say, it would be a great difficulty if we had to fight for more than a few days."

He showed me the powder, and pointed out his little factory in the distance. It was of a very fine round grain, but, as I afterwards discovered, nothing like English gunpowder in strength.

Alayar Khan presented me with some splendid quinces, which grew in his garden in the greatest profusion; and after looking lovingly at his province, and describing its beauties both for sport and agriculture, he descended with me to a lower storey, where we had to smoke the inevitable *kalioun*. It was a beautiful evening, and after wandering for months over the barren plains of Persia, and seeing nothing but ruin and misrule, I could sympathise with my host's feelings. Here he lay, with his little province around him, outside the great barrier of mountains that protects Northern Persia; a mere outpost, as it were, and with thousands of the wild Tekès within two marches of him; yet beneath us lay a smiling landscape, with order and evident respect for authority.

I complimented him upon the general state of the province as contrasted with the condition of those we had passed through. "It has been in my family for more than 150 years," he said, "even before the time of Nadir. But a few years ago intrigues were set on foot against me at Teheran, because I did not send the usual taxes.

I was sent for to Teheran and displaced; but in a short time the Turkomans overran the whole province, and the place was in such a desperate state that they sent me back. Now you shall see that even the villages on the great plain are in good order. I have even Turkoman villages," he added, "which I will show you. They behave very fairly, and will not let their countrymen plunder us if they can help it. Lately a good many have come in. They feel certain that the Russians will soon be at Merv, and they prefer to settle here."

To my inquiries about Kourschid Khan, the Turkoman chief of Merv, he answered: "He is a very brave and good man; but he does not know how to act. When the Russians went to Khiva he began fortifying Merv, and got thirty-four guns from different places, some from the Usbegs and some from Afghanistan; but I do not think he can possibly resist the Russians unless he gets some help. Will England give him any?"

"How can England possibly help the Tekès at that great distance from Hindostan?" said I. "Moreover, we have nothing to do with them; and if they plunder the Russians, of course they provoke attack."

"They have not done so," he replied. "The Tekès had nothing to do with the Khivan Expedition; still the Russians will come here all the same. Why," added he, "they have actually taxed the Turkomans. Who will gather the taxes? Soon they will come to Kizil Arvat, then to Bourma and Nissa, and then to Merv; all to collect the taxes, of course, from people who have never fought against them, and who are separated by some hundreds of miles from the Turkomans at Khiva."

"But what can the Tekès do?" I asked. "What do they wish for? You say that some have come over the frontier, and formed villages in your province. Why do

not more of them follow, if they do not feel safe where they are?"

"They will not come in large numbers," he responded. "They would rather join Shere Ali. They get on better with the Afghans, and like them much better than they do the Persians." *

"But do you mean," I inquired, "that they would like to be under Shere Ali?"

"Much better than under the Russians," was the answer. "But, as you know, Merv is very fertile; so is the country at the base of the mountains right away to Kizil Arvat; and the Persian Government makes no attempt to disturb the Turkomans settled there, although it belongs to Persia just as much as this province. The Russians will take it from the Turkomans, and then of course Persia will lose it altogether. I will send you to Kalkatchinar," he added, "some day. Those are my Turkoman villages in the extreme west; and from them you will see Annau, Askabat, Nissa, and away towards Kizil Arvat. All that country is occupied by the Akhal Tekès. You see, at Annau and Askabat they are quite close to us; but we watch the passes. Still, at times they give trouble. Only two years ago they were right round Mahomedabad in thousands, and we had to keep within the walls. They ravaged the country and retired. They never remain long; but I have spies, and usually find out beforehand when a *chapaoul* is preparing, and whether in large numbers. It takes them nearly a month to get their horses in condition, and as my spies let me know in time, I am ready for them, unless indeed they come in very large force."

"And you return the compliment," was my comment, "and make raids upon them?"

* The Afghans hold the same faith as the Turkomans.

"Often," he acknowledged. "It is the way of the country. We are always at war. Yet I have many friends amongst the Turkomans, and they come in and sell horses or trade with us in different ways. But you must be very careful," he continued, "and must promise not to leave the town without me or without a proper escort. I would rather be with you myself, for (who knows?) the Ramazan is approaching, and some fanatic may shoot you; and I should never forgive myself if anything happened."

I told him that I wished to go out shooting sometimes, and thought a small escort would be quite sufficient. "No," he said; "I will go with you. Only tell me, and I will be ready at any time."

We rode back at dusk, and I noticed that in the bazaars he took every pains to show the people his consideration for me, making me ride in front of him if the road narrowed, or in passing the gates. The bazaars were thronged with people, mostly well dressed, and with a manly, satisfied air about them. As the weather was getting cold, they were clad in the long yellow sheepskin coats which are so common in this country, and in black sheepskin caps. These coats are made with the woolly side in, the skin itself, which forms the outside, being tanned to the consistency and colour of wash-leather. They look neat, and are very warm and comfortable. The sleeves are made absurdly long, and very tight round the wrist, so that the hands can be drawn inside in very cold weather; when they serve as gloves.

On arriving home, I inquired about the wine of the country. Shaab was very mysterious; but at last he announced that a man had promised to bring in four bottles when it was dark, but that it must not be mentioned. Soon afterwards it appeared. Very light, but

pleasant and refreshing, I am convinced that it might be made into a sort of champagne. After this we always managed to keep up a supply during our stay in the Khoord country. The same evening Mollah Saduk came in with an air of secrecy, and after the lapse of some time asked whether we could kindly spare a couple of bottles of English wine for the Governor. We gave him two bottles of claret. They are always mysterious about it; but there is no doubt that a large amount of wine is both made and drunk in this neighbourhood. Properly corked, it would be excellent; but it is very carelessly manufactured, and then put into large round glass bottles holding about half a gallon, and which are stoppered with a piece of rag and some clay. Of course it will not keep long under these circumstances. Some of it was very slightly effervescent.

The next day we endeavoured to buy ancient arms and armour, genuine specimens of which can be found here. Some curious old helmets and chain-armour were offered; but, the prices asked being exorbitant, we could not make any purchases.

I was to have gone out shooting with the Governor in the afternoon, but Mollah Saduk came to say he was asleep. I do not know whether it was the effect of the claret. It is curious that these people, who do not usually drink wine, when they break through the rule almost invariably drink to intoxication. This, they seem to think, is the great object; and accordingly they generally prefer brandy, which operates more quickly. Mollah Saduk told me that preparations had been made for our starting next day to Abiverd and the low countries on our great pheasant-shooting expedition, and requested me to be ready early in the morning. G——'s leg was getting better, but he wisely determined to resist

temptation, and lay up until it was well. We were to be absent for a day or two; so I made preparations accordingly, and took two servants and two mules besides Shaab.

We were off at daybreak, I riding my little grey "Imaun." I always rode him now, for he was a most charming little horse, and it was considered rather *infra dig.* to ride upon ponies. Cremorne, therefore, had an easy time of it. The rendezvous was just outside the town, and a most curious scene presented itself. The horsemen were streaming through the gates without any sort of order, each man carrying attached to his saddle whatever he was likely to want. About a mile outside the gates I saw about 500 horsemen assembled, and on riding up found Alayar Khan in their midst. He introduced me to his next eldest brother whom I had not yet met, and who was Governor of Nowhandan, the neighbouring large town. Two other brothers were also present, one of whom had received us on our arrival at Chepishli. They seemed rather in awe of the chief, and there was no brotherly familiarity. All of them were very well mounted, and amongst the throng were some splendid specimens of fine horsemen and Turkoman horses. About a couple of hundred men came straggling up to us by ones and twos; but no notice was taken of their being late. I could not help thinking, that if I might pick about 500 out of the lot and just put them together for a few months, what a fine regiment I could make, for almost every man was a horseman! Mollah Saduk appeared mounted on a fat, cobby, grey pony, and was, as usual, full of antics, which provoked roars of laughter. Abbas Khan had joined me, and at last all were assembled, so we moved off; the crowd of men following without the slightest attempt at order, and pressing at our heels

Our course was due east, towards some hills a few miles distant, and in the direction of the river which we had crossed during our night ride to Chepishli. A few scouts were sent out to the right and left of the road, and we had not been long amongst the hills when a small herd of moufflon were disturbed, and they dashed across the track only a few hundred yards in front of us. Immediately there was a general scurry, and away went two or three hundred men as hard as they could go, firing at full gallop, without the slightest injury to the moufflon. After a chase of about a mile, the deer got among the rocky hills, where they soon beat us. Alayar Khan was very anxious to know if I had taken a shot. On expressing my disbelief in shooting from horseback, he told me that they nearly always fired mounted; and seeing some partridges running before us, he rode towards them and knocked one over from his horse. I saw him shoot well afterwards, but of course he missed very often, as the best shot must on horseback. He told me that this was their system of fighting, and that they galloped towards the enemy, continually firing whilst at the gallop. I explained that our system with cavalry was to form a line and charge straight in with the sword, and that our firing was usually from a distance and dismounted. He seemed to think that this was a much better plan, but again urged that he could not make a change without European officers.

We now reached a higher range of hills, and a peaked mountain lay to our left. The chief was most anxious that I should climb it, as he said there was a fine view and he would explain the country to me. There was, indeed, a beautiful view of the great desert and surrounding country. Abiverd lay to our front, with its two old towers still standing; and Kelat stood out

grandly to our right, not looking more than twenty miles away, though we knew it was three days' journey. Just below us wound the river which we had crossed on our march to Chepishli. After flowing through a broad valley, it ran out into the plain through a narrow pass commanded on the right bank by a fortified village, and, winding for a few miles out into the desert, it turned to its left and watered several small village forts, which we could see in the distance. Farther on we could trace the Tejend river running far beyond Abiverd, and in the distance a large dark patch marked Tejend itself, the termination of the Tejend river with its great beds of reeds, and the favourite camping ground of the Turkomans. Here they cultivate a considerable amount of land, and it is the first day's halt in going from Dereguez to Merv. I had a long talk to the Governor about Merv.

"Why do you want to go there?" he inquired. "Have you any message from your Government to the Turkomans? If you have an order from your Government, I will send you at once. I can get a thousand friendly Turkomans for your escort, if necessary. But, if you have no order, it would be madness. I could not send you; you would certainly be taken prisoner or killed."

I was obliged to confess that I had no special message for the Turkomans, and unfortunately no order from my Government.

We now descended to the river Rood Bar, and I was told that the "chasse" for partridges was about to commence. All my ideas of splendid shooting received a severe shock, but a most interesting and amusing scene began. The whole 700 men divided, and scattering by twos and threes covered a vast extent of country, some riding through the brushwood that fringed the

river. Soon an immense number of partridges rose in different directions, but there was no shooting. The partridges, seeing men on all sides, took a good long flight; but the moment they dropped, the nearest party of horsemen chased them at a gallop. Then the partridges, instead of rising again, would run, and, when nearly overtaken, would crouch and let the men jump off and pick them up. Every now and then birds would come over our heads, and we got a few shots, but not many. The whole scene was most exciting. As each bird dropped, loud shouts of "Hoy, Gelder hoy!" were raised to attract the attention of the distant horsemen, and then a race ensued after the poor birds. An enormous number of partridges were on foot, and the shouts and the chasing were incessant. It was evidently a popular sport, and no wonder, for men came riding up to the chief with the captured birds, and for every bird received a bunabat (5*d.*). In the course of two hours we got over a thousand partridges, and Alayar Khan told me that they sometimes got two thousand; but as I was anxious to go to Abiverd, and we had a long ride before us to Skirgau, where we were to sleep, and as it was important to get in before dark, he thought it better to push on. While we had been engaged in "partridge catching," Ismail, who had gone farther up the river, killed a wild boar that had been disturbed by the beaters.

Following the course of the river, we soon emerged upon the great desert. At the pass we were met by some of Alayar Khan's Turkomans from the villages which he had recently formed. I noticed the same look of merry cunning about them that I had remarked before, both at Kelat and at Ashourada. Their chief especially seemed much amused, and was full of questions.

No European had ever penetrated to these parts, and our arrival had created a sensation. We pushed right out into the desert in the direction of Abiverd, passing many tracks of the *goorkher*, or wild ass, which abounds and provides considerable sport, for only a very good horse will ride one down. In fact, the Khoords will tell you, in describing the merits of a good animal, that he can ride down a goorkher. Abiverd we found quite in ruins. Two brick towers, however, still stood as monuments of its former glory. I was very desirous to explore the old remains, but Alayar Khan was anxious to get to our resting-place and would move on; turning sharp, therefore, to the left, we made our way towards a village about eight miles distant, and nearer to the foot of the hills. It was dark when we reached it, and Skirgau, we ascertained, lay still two miles farther on.

All these villages are forts, and Skirgau was one of the old frontier earthworks which I have before described; but it was thoroughly occupied. Our 700 men disappeared mysteriously. Some remained behind at the last village; some pushed on to one farther ahead; and a swarm followed us through the gates and into a perfect rabbit-warren of small huts and narrow little streets, in which a horse could only just turn. Abbas Khan and I occupied one small house that had been prepared for us; but how all our horses, and those of about 200 of the escort, were stowed away in this place has always been a puzzle to me. No commissariat arrangements appeared to be necessary; every man provided for himself and looked after himself.

As we had ridden along in the evening over the salt sandy desert, with the swarm of men following on our track, I could fancy how Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, in the days long gone by, had crossed those great deserts,

and led their countless hordes towards the west, consuming everything in their line of march. But I also thought how in the face of modern science all the glory of these warlike hordes had departed, and that the breech-loader and the long-range rifle had for ever destroyed the danger to modern armies. Still such men, if well armed and drilled, would be very valuable in acting upon lines of communication. It is strange that these wild horsemen have never recognised this in their contests with Russian troops. They *will* attack the Russian infantry, and are of course beaten and subjugated; whereas if, abstaining from fighting, they would hang upon the line of communication, they would become very formidable, with their great powers of endurance and matchless horses.

Why this country should produce such horses is indeed singular. Why on these deserts the Arab should have grown into an animal more like an English race-horse than any other horse in the world, but with powers of endurance possessed by no other race, is beyond comprehension. And here, whilst there is a perfect dearth of horses in India, any number may be procured for a third of the sum given for stud-breds or Australians. Yet we have never dug into this mine of wealth, and never shall, for it will soon pass into other hands.

I had noticed that the chief had been rather depressed all day, and Abbas Khan explained to me the reason. His relations with Khorassan were, it would seem, critical. The Governor of Khorassan had marched from Meshed with 3000 men, and had reached Kelat. Alayar Khan had the promised support of Koochan, which could turn out 1000 horsemen, who were all ready, and 1000 Turkomans besides were prepared to join him.

He had sent a messenger to Kelat, offering to pay half the sum that had been demanded of him; but at the same time letting it be known that this was the ultimatum, and that, if the Kelat force advanced, a host of Turkomans would hang upon its rear. The issue was of course momentous to him, and his distressed look showed that he felt great anxiety.

At daybreak the next morning I had a message asking me to join him, as he wished to show me some sport. I found him seated on the top of a tower on the northern side of the fort, which commanded the whole of the plain below. A quarter of a mile from the village was an immense reed-bed. The chief, who was evidently in high spirits, informed me that his difficulty was over. Hussein Khan, considering that discretion was the wiser course, had discovered that the presence of his troops was required in Seistan, south of Meshed, and, accepting the half sum offered, had retired from Kelat. The scene at our feet was sufficiently exciting, but I could not stand patiently on the tower without longing to take part in it. The reed-bed was being beaten by the mounted men, and the whole country was alive with wild boar, which were being chased and fired at in all directions. But the horsemen had far too great a respect for the wild boar to have any great success. The usual plan was to gallop after them at about 80 yards' distance, firing and loading at the gallop; and the results were what might be expected.

I begged Alayar Khan to let me go down and join in the chase; but he said that he had made arrangements for our sport by-and-by, that this was merely an interlude, and that it was very amusing to sit there, drink tea, and look on. The country being beautifully open, one might have had splendid boar-spearing directly

the pig could be driven from the reed-bed. When I explained our system of boar-spearing to the chief, he pronounced it to be frightfully dangerous. "Pray," he said, "do not attempt anything of the sort whilst you are with me. Suppose an accident happened; what should I do? You are my guest, and I am responsible for your safety; pray be careful." I explained that we always hunted them thus in India; but he would not be satisfied.

I noticed that there were numberless pheasants in this reed-bed, and we soon afterwards mounted our horses and proceeded to a similar place about three miles off; where we found the escort assembled. They scattered all over the country, as on the previous day, and the same system was recommenced, but with pheasants instead of partridges. The bed was as well stocked with these birds as the best preserved covers in Norfolk. What splendid shooting one might have by beating these reed-beds scientifically, and with a good number of guns! But that was not the way of the country, and soon "Hoy, Gelder hoy!" resounded on all sides, and pheasants came pouring in to the chief, who again distributed his bunabats liberally. Many of these birds were brought in alive and quite unhurt. They were just like the English pheasant; very few had the ring round the neck, but a good many were slightly pied in the wing. In the course of three hours we had about a thousand.

Coming across the quite fresh tracks of a tiger, I wanted to follow him up; but they declared that he would have gone off to the reed-beds near Abiverd probably, and that it would be impossible to find him again. It struck me forcibly that there was no desire on their part to meet with so dangerous a beast. Alayar

Khan watched over me as if I were a child, and when he ascertained that I was on the tracks of the tiger, sent and begged me to join him and remain with him. Soon afterwards there was great shooting, and a magnificent wild boar burst from the reeds, followed by some forty or fifty men about a hundred yards off, firing in the most random manner. The boar came to bay, when, galloping up to a few yards of him, my steady little grey stood like a rock, and, as he charged, I gave him the right barrel of my No. 12 and knocked him over dead. How we all escaped without being shot was extraordinary, for bullets were whistling about in every direction, and no one seemed to dream that such a contingency might happen. Directly I had killed the boar, half-a-dozen men dismounted and hacked him to pieces with their cimeters. I was surprised at their asking whether they should not keep a piece of the boar for me; and by declining, I evidently rose high in their estimation. Alayar Khan reproved me gently for what he called "running into such danger" whilst with him, and the horsemen were loud in their praises of the rifle, at which I grew anxious, fearing that this trusty old friend might also be coveted.

We breakfasted close to what the chief called a stream of good water, but which no one in England would have touched. Mollah Saduk perpetrated his usual gross antics, and everybody was intensely amused except myself. The chief called up his best shots and best rifles, and practice was carried on at a small tower about 500 yards distant, Alayar Khan shooting with my 'Express,' which he had already learned that I intended to present to him, and which he viewed as a mother might her pet child. The Khoord rifles had no chance against the 'Express.' Fortunately I had a

dummy cartridge, or somebody would have been shot in the loading and extracting that went on by way of showing the rapidity with which it could be fired. A buzz of admiration burst from the throng of lookers-on, and the chief was in ecstacies with his present.

We now began to make our way back to Mahomedabad, which was about twenty miles distant, still beating any patches of reeds, and capturing more pheasants. I never once saw a bird rise a second time, though they would often run considerable distances before crouching. This system of "bird-catching" is very curious. Of course there can be no special peculiarity about these pheasants and partridges, and no doubt our own would do exactly the same under the same circumstances. The birds appear to get utterly scared at seeing horsemen in all directions, and at finding themselves chased whenever they alight; but I should like to see the system tested, if it were possible, with English partridges. Autumn manœuvres on some Dorsetshire down might give an opportunity, if any proprietor of the shooting were willing to try the experiment.

We soon reached the lower hills that separate the great deserts from Mahomedabad. The country was very barren, all sandy waste. The swarming escort thronged around us, and raised so thick a dust that we could only see for a few yards; occasionally some of the captains would call them back if they pressed in front of the chief and myself, but with only a momentary effect. When we halted for a short time, the chief desired to show me how well his men could shoot at a gallop. One man took off his sheepskin cap and laid it on the ground. Then picked shots rode quickly past at about twenty yards, and fired as they galloped; but very few

hit it. He was very urgent that I should try, and with some little reluctance I attempted it. The first shot was a failure; but the second, which struck close under the cap, was pronounced very creditable. I soon found out the knack. When nearing the object, the horse should be urged to his utmost speed, the reins dropped for a moment, aim taken, and the object fired at immediately after it has been passed; but, of course, the shooting is very wild, as all mounted firing must be, even with the most practised shots.

We now got amongst the low mountains which separate the plains of Dereguez from the desert towards the north, and I was surprised to see some rich well-watered valleys and several flourishing villages. The roofs of all the houses were crowded with women and children, eager to see the first Frank that had ever visited their country. I had a long and interesting conversation with Alayar Khan. He was most anxious to know all about England. I astonished him with an account of the revenue of the British Empire, and dwelt, in connexion therewith, upon the very light taxation. Hereupon he begged me to give him a general description of our system of government. I now found myself embarked in an attempt to explain the British Constitution through an indifferent interpreter to a Khoord chief—that British Constitution which we all admire so much, but which "no fellow can understand." Soon, however, I brought Alayar Khan back to his own land, and to the politics of Central Asia; subjects upon which, from his thorough knowledge of the country, and from his clear common sense, his opinion was of considerable value. I asked him how it was that he was so thoroughly acquainted with all that was passing both in Khiva, Bokhara and Khokand, seeing that almost

every day he had some fresh piece of news for me. "We have a regular system of correspondence at these places," he said; "and people are always going and coming. We have no newspapers, like you; but we have news-writers and keep up constant communication with the surrounding states."

He immediately reverted to the old topic—England and Russia.

"It is of no use talking of Persia, Afghanistan, and Bokhara," he proceeded. "There are only two real powers in Asia,—England and Russia; and in course of time all the others will become vassals of one or the other. You talk to me of Afghanistan as an independent state. You will never get the people of Central Asia to believe it. We know full well that Shere Ali must be more or less the vassal of England or of Russia. Do you suppose we are so ignorant of the value of Herat? Whatever you may say or think, there is not a bazaar in Hindostan that would not believe that your rule had departed if that city fell into Russian hands. You have told me of all your wealth, and that you have a population nearly three times as great as Russia; but most of these people must be in Hindostan: and suppose they turned against you, as they undoubtedly would if Russia were at Herat? No! I believe in your riches, but not in your men. You acknowledge that Russia has a much larger army. While she is far away from you, that does not matter; but she is coming nearer and nearer—so fast, indeed, that it will soon be a question of life and death to India. Your safety consists in keeping her a long way off. Instead of that, however, you are letting her advance at a prodigious rate; and in a few years you will pay the penalty: but then it will be too late. See how far she has advanced in the

last ten years! Ten years more will bring her to your frontier; and do you believe that your people will remain quiet in Hindostan when she is there? No! You will have constant intrigues and constant wars. I believe you govern very well — everyone says so; much better than the Russians,—and you try to do real good to the people you have conquered. But you *have* conquered them, and they will wish for change. They may repent it afterwards; but that will not prevent their turning against you at the time."

I spoke of Afghanistan as a barrier that might prevent any near approach. He laughed at the idea.

"Do you believe that the Afghans could stand one moment against the Russians?" he asked. "Why, ten thousand Russians could march from Kizil Arvat to Candahar. No! We have no chance against them now. Things have changed; we cannot fight against your new guns; and we have no training. English troops might stop the Russians, but not Afghans. Besides," he continued, "do you suppose all the Afghans would be with you? They will do anything for money. You would pay them, and so would Russia. Half, therefore, would be for you, and half for her. But that is not of much importance. They could not stand against either one or the other. But,"—he was emphatic here,—"how do you expect to prevent Russia from taking Herat, when once she is at Merv? Are you going to send English troops to Herat?"

"There is no present idea of anything of the kind," I said; "and Russia is not yet at Merv."

"But she will be, and that soon," he urged; "if you do not prevent her. You talk of an Afghan frontier; but where is that frontier? Sometimes it is here; sometimes it is there; it depends upon who rules at Herat

or Caubul. The Moorghab river runs from Afghanistan to Merv. You know well that in this country, where there is water, troops can move. The banks of the Moorghab are fertile. How near to Herat along this river do you intend to let Russia advance and settle?"

Utterly nonplussed, I took refuge in Mr. Grant Duff's theory—that it would be a long time before all this happened. "Yes," he responded; "but it will happen; and you will have to fight when it is too late, whereas, if you would act now, it would never happen."

I am afraid I did not come very well out of the controversy. He met theories by facts; and if the optimists and advocates of masterly inactivity—which in this case simply means doing nothing that is troublesome, but letting difficulties accumulate for those who come after you—could only have listened to him, I think they would have felt less happy in their minds. Never before in Persia had I met a man so ready to give geographical information; and all his descriptions of places we subsequently visited were correct. This is very rare in Persia, where an atmosphere of falsehood seems to prevail. I told him plainly that we were anxious to map out this country, which was so little known, and showed him our existing maps, in which his province was marked simply as one town called Dereguez. He offered every aid, and gave it without any *arrière pensée*.

It was quite dark when we reached Mahomedabad, and some of the escort galloped forwards, firing their guns and giving notice of our approach. Then our cavalcade melted away, most of them straggling off to the different villages to which they belonged; and we had only about 200 men left upon our entry into the town.

CHAPTER XV.

Merv—Nowhandan—Duringa—Kalkatchinar—Koochan.

I FOUND G—— improving rapidly from his rest, and he had no event to chronicle during my absence.

Gerome was laid up very ill with a bad sore throat. Poor fellow! he could scarcely speak; I doctored him, but was sadly afraid for a day or two that he was going to have a bad fever. The drainage of our establishment was evidently not in such a state as would have passed the Sanitary Commissioners, and we often used to fear the result. We had a supply of carbolic acid, but soon expended it all in a vain attempt to counteract the smells. Moreover, the well from which we derived our water was within a few feet of the sewer. We sent out for other water, but it looked worse than our own; and, on the principle of the "Devil you know," we gave it up and succumbed to circumstances.

Abbas Khan was now obliged to leave us, and we were very sorry to lose him. He was an excellent man, and a most valuable servant to the Legation, for his knowledge and ideas of politics were far in advance of the general run of persons of his class. A man of excellent manners and address, he had often been of the greatest service to us from his familiarity with the country. He

was devoted to his work, but must have had a difficult game to play. As an example of the mode in which unjustly petty economies, carried to an extreme on the part of the Government, may act in far-quarters of the world, I may mention a little instance that came to my knowledge with regard to him. At Meshed there are two news-writers, one English and the other Russian, and they send a courier with their letters every month to Teheran. Owing, however, to some order respecting expenses issued by the late Government, the sum allowed for the courier from Meshed was withdrawn. Thus Abbas Khan found either that all his letters must go through the regular post, where they would of course be opened and read, or else that he must continue to send a courier at his own expense. And this he did rather than have England looked down upon and be sneered at by his Russian rival. The office of reporter from Meshed, it must be borne in mind, should be no sinecure. Close to that part of Central Asia which is certainly the most important, near to Herat and the Afghan frontier, England has no other representative for many hundreds of miles. Rather than allow his office and the country he represented to suffer, Abbas Khan forwarded the courier at his own expense, and thus consumed nearly all the pay he received from the British Government.

I gave Abbas Khan a commission to execute. Considering that the importation of such a horse into England might prove of invaluable use in adding staying powers to our thoroughbred stock, I had resolved to purchase a high-class Turkoman stallion, and having discovered by this time that it was impossible to procure a really first-class throughbred horse of known repute under a fabulous sum; my thoughts turned to the

animal we had seen at Kelat, and I gave Abbas Khan authority to buy him for me. This commission he faithfully executed; but the horse did not arrive at Teheran until after we had left. Forwarded by the kindness of Major Smith, R.E., he and my little grey "Imaum" marched right away by Tabreez and Erivan to Tiflis, and, being sent on from there to Constantinople, arrived safely in England after spending more than a year on the journey.

I believe that "Merv" will prove most useful in imparting endurance to the English race-horse of the future. Standing nearly sixteen hands high, remarkable both for speed and endurance, and of course quite thoroughbred, he may have as great an influence on the thoroughbred horse of the future, as the Darley Arabian has had in the past. "Imaum" I brought home as a specimen of the class of animal that might be purchased in any number for our Indian cavalry at a cost of from £15 to £20, although he is very much smaller than the usual run of horses, which would average about 15.1½ to 15.2.

October 24th.—The Governor sent word that, if I liked, he would go out at one o'clock to shoot bustards, which are found in considerable numbers in the plains round Mahomedabad. We shot a few of the smaller sort, but did not see any of the larger kind on this side of the mountains. Some of the Governor's men killed two or three with ball when they were too wild to be approached with guns. It showed very good shooting, but utterly destroyed the birds. We also got a few partridges, and some of the smaller sort, which for the table were preferable to the larger.

No message had yet arrived from Merv. I generally spent my days in writing during the morning, and in a shooting-ride with Alayar Khan in the afternoon.

On these expeditions Mollah Saduk was an invariable attendant. There was a good deal of shrewd common-sense about the "jester," and if one wanted anything done, he was quite the best person to apply to.

I had given Alayar Khan all the cartridges that were remaining for the Express rifle; but it struck me that, as we had some chlorate of potash and sulphuret of antimony, it might be possible to reload the caps of the fired cartridges with detonating powder, and that, if the chief got a cast of the ball, he might use the cases over again, since we had the tools for reloading. Accordingly I set to work, and succeeded adimrably. Alayar Khan got a perfect cast of the bullet in stone, and from this mould a good supply of bullets was made. We had a long interview at his house one morning, when I explained the whole process. He was very anxious to see the new cartridges tested. At the end of the courtyard, about eighty yards off, was a building with a large mark of a bullet in the walls.

"Fire at that," he said.

The ball hit the mark exactly, merely enlarging the hole, and the next shot was not an inch to the right; whereupon he was quite happy and contented. Having made some detonating powder, I gave it to him with many cautions as to its use and danger.

I now determined to wait no longer, but to start for Duringa and Kalkatchinar, whence we could always return if the Merv letter proved satisfactory. At any rate, we should be continuing our explorations in the meantime.

October 27th.—In the morning I visited Alayar Khan. He was holding a great *durbar* in the courtyard, but, upon seeing me, immediately rose and received me in his house. He told me that he wished to present me

with a horse, and directed them to bring into the yard one he had just selected. It was not a very prepossessing-looking animal, but afterwards proved to be of great repute, and a first-rate horse both for pace and endurance. In fact, no one could have behaved better than this Khoord chief. His hospitality and kindness were thoroughly genuine. Having one day mentioned to him my wish to see a wild ass, he immediately sent off a man into the desert, who returned with one that he had shot. It was a large animal, as big as a small mule, of a yellow-dun colour, and with a black stripe down the back. They are considered very good to eat, and the flesh is much prized.

To-day we discovered that Shaab had given my watch, which I had allowed him to wear, to the old Khan from Meshed, of course receiving a large present in return. This was rather too cool. Upon my explaining the circumstance to the Governor, the watch was sent back, and no doubt the present had also to be refunded. Subsequently I met the old Khan, and myself presented him with the watch. Shaab was to leave us at Koochan, and his ruling spirit made him employ the residue of his time to the best advantage. I never knew a man so eaten up with avarice. But for this infirmity he would have made an excellent servant.

October 28*th.*—Had a final shooting excursion with Alayar Khan, as we had arranged to leave the next day for Nowhandan. From the long delay in answering my letter, I began to despair somewhat about our chance of seeing Merv.

October 29*th.*—We started with Alayar Khan and a considerable escort; and he accompanied us to within a few miles of Nowhandan, where his brother met us with one hundred men. We now bade good-bye to the kind-

hearted chief, after a most affectionate farewell. He had really grown quite fond of us, and nothing could have exceeded his kindness during our whole stay. He had arranged, he said, that his brother should attend upon us with an escort of 200 men until our return to him, if the Merv letter proved satisfactory, or until we reached Koochan, if it were otherwise. Around Nowhandan we saw large vineyards, and Mollah Saduk, who came to wish us good-bye, brought some excellent wine manufactured therefrom.

The letter from Merv soon afterwards arrived. Kourschid Khan wrote most civilly, but begged us on no account to come there, as it would give rise to great trouble with his people, and he could not be answerable for our safety. Of course, in the face of this letter, it would have been absurd to attempt to push forward to Merv. I determined, therefore, to make our way to Annau, Askabat, and Nissa; then crossing the mountains to Koochan, to trace the source of the Attrek, and follow it down to the farthest point possible, exploring the country about the Monah valley. We had the Russian survey with us, giving the country from Kizil Arvat to Burma, the west slopes of the Kuren Dagh from Kizil Arvat to the Simbur, and the course of the Attrek from its junction with the Simbur to the Caspian. My object was to complete the unknown and unmapped Kuren Dagh range from Dereguez to Burma, and the Attrek from its source to its descent into the plains.

Let me here give a description of Merv, for, from its great strategical value as the key to Herat, this oasis seems destined to become so important in the future history of the East, that it merits more than a passing notice. The following particulars are derived from a variety of sources. Whilst at Meshed, Kelat,

and Dereguez, I constantly met people who knew it well, and from them I never failed to endeavour to extract information concerning it. I also held conversations on the subject with Mr. Taylor Thomson, who visited Merv on his way to Khiva in 1842. From these sources I have gathered the present short sketch.

The original town of Merv is said to have been built by Alexander the Great, and it afterwards became one of the most important cities of Persia. Like most of the great cities of past empires, it had its days of prosperity and times of adversity. When the successors of Mahomet turned their arms against Persia in their successful endeavours to proselytise with fire and sword, we know that Yesdegird, the humbled satrap, was compelled to take refuge in this far-distant capital. But even this isolated oasis did not long escape the ever-conquering Saracens and was obliged to accept the new religion. Eventually it became a constant source of contention between the Persians and the Usbegs. In 1787 it was conquered by Shah Moorad of Bokhara, who wasted the country, and endeavoured to destroy the watercourses to which it owed its prosperity. From that time it seems to have gradually decayed, being sometimes occupied for a time by Persia, but ultimately relinquished entirely to the Turkomans. A few years ago, Persia determining again to take permanent possession of it, sent an army of 20,000 men against Merv. The place was occupied with little difficulty, and the Persian army then lapsed into a state of utter listlessness. No precautions were taken; and the Turkomans, having collected about 5000 men, suddenly surprised the Persian camp, utterly routing it, and taking most of their guns, besides numberless prisoners. The Persians, thoroughly dis-

couraged, have since then made no further attempt, although they still pretend that it belongs to them.

Merv is situated in the desert, about 100 miles north of the Kuren Dagh range. It comprises an oasis 90 miles in circumference; and through this runs the river Moorghab, which rises in the mountains immediately north of Herat. This river now runs, beyond the oasis of Merv, for nearly 100 miles into the desert; but probably, when Merv was occupied and flourishing, all its waters were consumed in irrigation. Merv is remarkable for its fine climate and its extraordinary fertility. The former is the more remarkable, because Khoondooz, Andekhui, and Balkh, which have a somewhat similar position at the northern foot of the mountains, are all very unhealthy. Even the upper waters of the Moorghab are notoriously insalubrious.

The soil of Merv yields no less than three crops in the year, and in its palmy days it maintained a population of upwards of a million. As in most Persian districts highly blessed by Nature, the remains of several towns of different eras may still be traced. The ruins of four large cities are distinctly visible at the present day. It has ever been a weakness with Persian conquerors to destroy flourishing towns, and to build new ones in close proximity to their sites. But although the cities have been destroyed (and, as the Turkomans occupy tents, no attempt has been made to rebuild them), the vast watercourses created in different ages, much dilapidated though they are, still survive. When the recent Russian Expedition to Khiva convinced the Tekè Turkomans that their independence would soon be threatened, they, under the leadership of Kourschid Khan, commenced an extensive system of fortification by making use of these watercourses,

and by building walls and earthworks which they armed with thirty-four guns, some of which were taken from the Persians, and some obtained from the Usbegs and Afghans. Finding, however, that Khiva could make no resistance to the Russian troops, they stopped the works, and now await in fear and trembling their impending fate; casting longing eyes the while towards any Power that they think may rescue them from their dreaded and hated enemy. For, although the Russians have not been engaged with the Merv Turkomans, their cruelty to some of the other tribes has given them a very bad name in this part of Central Asia. The Tekès have recently been making overtures to Shere Ali, and there can be no doubt that Merv is the natural outwork of Herat, with the advantage of a water-supply all the way between the two cities, whereas between Merv and the Oxus at Charjui a tract of desert extends, with only a few brackish wells. It would therefore seem to be very desirable that Russia should not cross this desert tract. Strategically it would be, so to say, forming a lodgment on the glacis of Herat. It is curious that neither Dost Mahomed nor Shere Ali has occupied Merv. Lying just on the borders of Afghanistan, such a consummation would be most desirable, and it would avoid the certain complications that must arise if it falls into Russian hands. If Persia reoccupied her true boundary on the northern slopes of the Kuren Dagh, all the Akhal Tekès both could and would remove to Merv; and with an Afghan garrison occupying that place, these dreaded barbarians might be converted into a useful and efficient frontier force.

I was anxious to accomplish our journey before the rainy season set in, for in a strategical point of view a knowledge of the water-supply was most important,

and no idea could be formed of this when the rains had once begun. We were told we might expect them during the last fortnight of November; so I determined to push on without loss of time.

Nowhandan lies about seven miles west of Mahomedabad. We had now turned our faces to the West, and every mile was bringing us homewards. Although we had failed in our attempt to reach Merv, I felt that we were doing much more useful work in thus exploring the northern slopes of the Kuren Dagh. Merv had been visited by several Englishmen, whereas these northern slopes were absolutely unknown, and no European had ever yet set foot on them. I inquired eagerly wherever we went if any Russian had penetrated here? but the answer was everywhere the same, that no Frank before ourselves had ever visited this part of the country. G—— was most careful in his observations, and the patient way in which he kept his journal, recording every angle in the road for mile after mile of these long weary journeys, was most persevering, while I kept the notes of the more distant ranges, and general features of the country.

Those who have not travelled in Persia can never imagine the utter weariness of spirit that comes over one when marching slowly for months in that barren, uninteresting land. At one time I had thought that I should never set my face westward; but now we were journeying on with the sun at our backs of a morning, not blazing in our faces, and reminding us that we were ever travelling away from all that was most dear to us.

October 30*th*.—We started from Nowhandan with our escort and the brother of Alayar Khan, with the design of marching to Duringa, the most northern Khoord village of the province of Dereguèz, although the Turkoman villages of Kalkatchinar, also belonging to Dere-

guez, lie in the valley which leads from Duringa down into the plains near Annau. Passing numerous little village forts, we marched up the course of the river which waters Nowhandan and Mahomedabad. So intense was the curiosity to see us that the roofs of all the houses were crowded. The stream increased considerably in volume as we progressed.* To the left we passed two detached mountains lying out on the plain and separating us from the main range of the Kuren Dagh. The rocky hills dividing the Dereguez plains from the desert still continued on our right, and drew in gradually towards the main mountains. Mahomet Ali, my old horsekeeper, had decorated the tail of my little grey "Imaum," with blue beads. It was a spell, he said, to keep him strong and well on our journey; but, as they spoilt his tail, I was obliged to explain to Mahomet Ali that "Imaum" required no spell, only attention on his part and plenty of corn. And my spell had the better effect of the two. The horse that Alayar Khan had given me proved so bad a hack that I scarcely ever rode anything but "Imaum" for the rest of the journey. After travelling about twenty-five miles, we came upon the three villages of Duringa lying within a few miles of each other; all on the stream which waters the western Dereguez villages, and which at this point was very rapid, for we had ascended considerably from Nowhandan.

October 31*st*.—The low range of mountains to the north of Dereguez closes in and joins the main range just west of Duringa; and after ascending some 600 feet and marching N.N.W., we descended by a valley in which a stream ran from a spring and watered the Turkoman villages of Kalkatchinar. These villages, as

* This river is gradually absorbed in irrigation.

I have before mentioned, are under the rule of Alayar Khan.

There were a good many partridges on the rocky hills to our right, and a wild-looking village youth was stalking them with a very heavy small-bore rifle. I heard him fire five or six shots, and soon afterwards he came down the mountain to us with five partridges, all killed with ball. This was very good shooting; and the youth must have been an awkward customer on his native mountains.

We passed the three villages of Kalkatchinar, all regular forts and lying on the stream that flowed through the rapidly descending valley. At last, after riding about fifteen miles from Duringa, we came to a narrow pass, the only way from the desert into this part of Dereguez. It was guarded by eight or nine villagers, Turkomans from Kalkatchinar, but keeping guard to prevent their countrymen the Tekès of Annau from making any sudden raid upon them. Annau lay peacefully just below at the foot of the hills. I noticed a mysterious consultation going on between the chief's brother and some of his principal followers; among whom was one splendid Khoord, who had attracted my attention on our expedition to Abiverd. He was a light and wiry, yet powerful man, and the *beau ideal* of an irregular horseman. He rode a beautiful thoroughbred brown Turkoman of about 15.3 in height; and I had heard that he was renowned for the number of Turkomans he had slain and the forays he had led. This man was in earnest conversation with the leader of our party. After a time the Chief of Nowhandan came to me.

"My men are anxious that you should see a chapaoul," he said; "and have proposed that, taking sixty of the best mounted men, leaving the rest here as a support,

we should swoop down on Annau. They have no idea that we are here; and we shall take them by surprise. It is an excellent opportunity."

This excellent opportunity meant a dash at the devoted village, the murder of all the men, and the capture of all the women, children, and flocks.

I explained to our leader that this must not be; that we, as English officers, had no quarrel with the Turkomans; and that, much as we were interested in their manners and customs, I could not permit such an act, nor become a participator in it. My decision was very badly received, and, after a fresh consultation, another attempt was made to persuade me. Firm as a rock, I said that if anything of the sort were attempted, I should send a letter to Alayar Khan, who would be very angry. The project was reluctantly abandoned; and below us, looking as peaceful as if war and rapine were unknown, lay the unsuspecting village—the men and boys lazily tending their herds, the women weaving carpets in the tents, and the children basking in the sun, never dreaming that their savage enemies were plotting murder and destruction just above them, and that a few short minutes would have sealed their fate. Little thought they that the Feringhi was whispering words of mercy on their behalf, and saving them from captivity and death.

Not suffering our escort to remain any longer under the influence of temptation, I gave the order to make for a high mountain peak above the lowest village, from which it was evident we could get good observations of the base of the Kuren Dagh and the Turkoman villages, and take angles. We had some difficulty, and took a considerable time in the ascent; but it well repaid the trouble. Right below us lay Annau and Askabat; beyond, was

Nissa; and standing out from the great range, yet severed from it only by five or six miles, stood the prominent mountain Markuh, a great landmark, and one that proved very useful to us afterwards. Beyond Markuh lay Akhal, but in the far distance I saw what puzzled me extremely—a lofty range of mountains bending up towards the north-west until lost in the distance.* What could this mean? Did the main range run suddenly north-west beyond Markuh? Or was it a detached range, such as the Dereguez low mountains, only higher? We could see that, as far as the eye could reach, the country at the foot of the plain was well-watered, and the range of white-looking forts which I had seen and traced all the way from Sarakhs still continued. The Turkomans who had followed us up the hill were naturally conversant with the country, and they spoke of these slopes as a sort of paradise—plenty of good water and fertility everywhere, and Turkoman villages in numbers right away to Kizil Arvat. After taking all the different bearings, we wended our way back to Duringa.

November 1st.—We were determined to go from Duringa to Koochan. There is a main road from Mahomedabad; but, having come far away to the west, we had to cross the mountains by a different pass.

We passed the other villages of Duringa, as we still ascended the river, but finding, after proceeding a few miles, that it came right down through a cleft in the rock, we crossed it and left it on our right, ascending a gently sloping ravine. This gradually grew narrower and narrower, until in some parts it was no more than

* Akhal is both the name of a place and a large district, and gives its name to all the Turkomans living at the base of this part of the Kuren Dagh chain.

fifty yards in width. Occasionally its dreariness was relieved by trees, and by more verdure than usual. Here our chief came to wish us good-bye. There was little or no chance, he said, of meeting Turkomans between this and Koochan. He would provide us with an escort of a dozen men, which we should find ample. I gave him my deer-stalking telescope, for we were getting very short of presents, and there were several chiefs yet to be propitiated.

Gradually ascending until the aneroid marked 8000 feet we reached the top of the pass; and still the peaks rose at least 2000 feet higher on either side. Just as we neared the crest of the ridge there was an alarm of Turkomans; but it was only some armed villagers who, seeing us, had mistaken us for Turkomans, and were bolting wildly up the most rocky peaks in order to escape. We now descended considerably, and looked down to the south of the Kuren Dagh range. The hills seemed to lie in successive ridges, each towards the south lower than the other. After marching about thirty miles we arrived at the villages of Inché, where we were to halt for the night. The evenings were now very cold on the mountains, and we were not sorry to get into a hut with a fireplace and chimney, in which we soon had some logs of juniper-wood blazing merrily. The horses, well clothed, stood out, but, although there was a hard frost each night, they did not seem to suffer; and "Imaum" was as sleek as when we started from Meshed.

Before we left Dereguez, I had asked Alayar Khan to let me take one of his men as a servant, for it had been arranged that Shaab should leave us at Koochan, and we should have been short-handed. He did not much like the application. "Suppose he turns out badly, and robs

you," he said, "what shall I do then? Give me a paper saying you will take all the responsibility."

I complied with this demand, and Roostum, a smart, active Khoord, who had volunteered to come if his chief consented, was now installed as my servant. He had never acted in that capacity, but was willing and anxious to do his best. The Governor of Koochan, we ascertained, had been here only a few days before with a large number of mounted men, ready, I suspect, in case Alayar Khan had required his services.

The next morning was damp and misty, and we had a wretchedly cold ride. Gradually descending until we looked right into the Koochan valley, we saw numberless villages in all directions; and the town of Koochan, evidently of some importance, and surrounded by extensive gardens, was lying below us. This is the same broad fertile valley in which Meshed lies, and which runs by Koochan and Shirvan to the Attrek. In fact, as at Kelat, Dereguez, and Duringa, we had been traversing the northern, so we were now progressing along the southern slopes of the Kuren Dagh. But away again to the south of the broad valley lay another high range, but not so lofty as that from which we had descended. This is the range which we had crossed between Derrood and Meshed, and which separates Meshed from Nishapoor, and forms the southern ridge of this broad and fertile Meshed-Koochan valley.

We had been assured that we should find the Governor of Koochan most civil, and that he knew we were about to pay him a visit; but we were within two miles of the town, and there was no sign of anyone coming to meet us. Despatching Shaab, therefore, in advance to herald our approach, we waited in order to give time to repair the omission. In about an hour Shaab returned

very cross. The Governor was asleep, and no preparations had been made for us. I would wait no longer, but pushed on. At the entrance-gate we met a few farashes and the Mirza to the Governor; who, profuse in his apologies, said we had not been expected so early, that the Governor was asleep, and that they had been afraid to awake him, but that a house would be ready for us directly. We followed him through the town for a considerable distance. The place was in a dilapidated state, having been almost destroyed by an earthquake about two years before; and we were told that these convulsions of Nature were frequent here.

On reaching the house allotted to us, which was a very good one, we found it still occupied; but the people were then clearing out. As in Persia to pass over any omission of etiquette is the greatest error, I had to pretend to be in a towering passion, and told the headman that we had intended to stay for two or three days, but should certainly now leave the next morning. When everything had settled down, the truth came out. Koochan makes excellent wine, and the Governor sometimes over-indulged. This had been the case the night before; and he had not been himself when we arrived, and had consequently issued no directions for our proper reception. Later in the afternoon another chief waited on us, who, on the part of the Governor, expressed his extreme regret at what had occurred, and begged us to overlook it, and not to think of leaving on the next day. The Governor, he assured us, had been looking forward to our visit, and was most anxious to please us in every way. This untoward event had happened from pure accident. And, by way of making amends, he brought us two chairs and a table.

It may seem extraordinary, but, as for months past we

had been sitting on the ground, no one can imagine the extreme delight with which we welcomed these reminders of European civilisation. No simulated anger could stand against this provision of comfort; and, slowly relenting, I agreed to accept the apology, arranged to pay a visit to the Governor the next day, and engaged not to proceed on our journey until the day after. As though the table and chairs were not enough, an excellent Persian dinner was sent to us, with some capital Koochan wine, so that, ere we sought our beds, the Governor was quite forgiven.

November 3rd.—Paying our visit to the Governor, we found him living, not in a house, but in a very large Turkoman tent; and now saw how very comfortable these tents might be made. The floor was covered all over with thick felt, and on this were spread some beautiful carpets. The inside was lined with chintz. There was a small stove in the tent, and close to the Governor and on his especial carpet were chairs awaiting us. He was most civil, and offered to do anything in his power. A beautiful kalioum, profusely inlaid with precious stones, was brought in.

Of course he talked politics. It was the old story again—England and Russia, and their relative might. He proved rather inquisitive, and wanted to know the number of men in our army; and I am afraid that in my answer I included the militia and volunteers. He was evidently puzzled to imagine what had brought us there if we had no political mission. I told him boldly that we had come to see the country and make a map of it.

"And what does your Government pay you for coming all this way and doing so?" he inquired.

I explained that we were paid nothing.

"But who pays for all your mules—your expenses?"

I told him that we paid for them ourselves. "But what can induce you to spend your money in this way? What good can it do you?"—I answered that in England we took pleasure in any work that might be of advantage to our country, and that we looked upon that as a sufficient reward.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with a sigh; "none of Iran's children would do anything for her without being paid."

He gave us a letter to his brother at Shirvan, requesting him to do all that we required, and he explained where we should find the source of the Attrek.

"You passed a dry watercourse coming into the town," he said. "Well, in the winter and spring there is water in it which comes down from a village called Itabile in the hills, about fourteen miles from here. This is the commencement of the Attrek when there is water in it; but the real commencement is at a very curious spring which I will tell my brother to direct you to, as it is only a few miles from Shirvan. That spring, as you will see, is the true source of the river, which, eventually reaches the plains and runs into the Caspian."

November 4th.—Knowing that we had a long march (thirty-six miles) to Shirvan, we started early. Our escort of about twenty men, was commanded by a fine old Khoord, mounted on a great, bony Turkoman horse, nearly seventeen hands high. There was another horse in the escort standing about 16.1, and with immense bone and powers, yet looking quite thoroughbred. In England it would have been worth 200*l.* as a weight-carrying hunter, and I could have bought it for 25*l.* What splendid artillery horses could be purchased here for India! And yet the Indian Government will not develope this source of supply.

We passed numberless villages; the whole valley was well watered and largely cultivated, and the sides of the mountains on either hand teemed with flocks and herds. The road was so level and good, as to be easily practicable for artillery. About three miles before reaching Shirvan we found a strong escort drawn up to receive us, and of a different stamp from any we had yet seen. These were regular mounted rifles, and they were actually formed up in an attempt at a line.

Shirvan is a large and important town, and our arrival had attracted a vast crowd. A house with a good garden was ready for our accommodation; and we engaged to call upon the Governor in the morning before proceeding to Boojnoord. It was thirty-six miles to that place, and I doubted whether we should get there before night, as we had determined regularly to explore the source of the Attrek.

CHAPTER XVI.

Karakazan—Boojnoord—Monah Valley—Pishcalla—Semulghan.

INSTEAD of following the main road between Shirvan and Boojnoord, we kept more to the north, and about five miles from the town came upon the Kara Kazan, the extraordinary spring from which the Attrek really rises. It was a dark pool of about sixty yards in diameter, and into it from the south ran a stream, which issued from the surface in numberless springs only a few yards higher up. In the centre of this dark pool, also, numerous springs bubbled up; and so great was the supply, that out of the north side of the pool ran a river, the virgin Attrek, which at the distance of a few hundred yards entered the then dry watercourse traced by us from Koochan, that begins at Itabile, fourteen miles from that place.

Kara Kazan (the black caldron) is certainly a most curious spot; and it is singular that it has never been mentioned by any travellers passing Shirvan, since Baillie Fraser, Burnes, and one or two other Englishmen have marched along the road from Koochan to Boojnoord. In fact, there are no difficulties in doing so. The Turkomans never cross the Kuren Dagh in this neighbourhood, and between Meshed and Boojnoord there

THE SOURCE OF THE ATTRAK — KARA KAZAN

is a good road all the way, much better and easier than the often-travelled main road between Shahrood and Meshed. These travellers, I suppose, kept along the main road from Shirvan to Boojnoord, and did not strike away to the west in search of the Attrek source as we had done. For the Attrek does not flow past Boojnoord, but more to the north; and a range of mountains lies between it and the plain on which the town of Boojnoord stands.

When we left Constantinople G—— had bought three pint bottles of champagne, which we had agreed were not to be drunk until we reached the source of the Attrek. Curiously enough one of our party had broken down, and one bottle of champagne had been broken. The other two were still intact, and, ordering them to be put into the spring to cool while breakfast was being prepared, we sat down to sketch the curious source of this much-debated river. When breakfast was ready, the champagne was produced, and we drank to the Attrek and friends at home; but the wine was lukewarm. Yet we had seen it put into the water. Running down to the stream, I dipped my hands into it. It was a tepid spring, and in it we had been trying to cool champagne!

Avoiding the direct road to Boojnoord, we followed the river, eager to trace the stream along its course, now that we had once found it. But we had lost so much time in our examination of the spring, and by adopting this longer route, that it was evident we should not reach Boojnoord that night. I determined, therefore, to camp by the river side. Late in the afternoon we came to a place where the broad valley through which it ran, closing in, became a narrow rocky gorge. Here we were informed the Koochan province ended and Boojnoord began. A little beyond, and on

the left bank of the Attrek, lay a small village, Sissou, at which I resolved to halt, and therefore sent on Gerome to see the head-man of the village, and to make arrangements. On our arrival, we found the gate of the village closed, and all the villagers, with the head-man, seated on the walls. He distinctly refused us admission, and was most insolent. I showed him the paper which we had received from the Governor of Khorassan, and also one from the Shah's representative at Teheran, but, laughing at both documents, he said he did not care for either, that we had no order from his Governor, and that we should neither have supplies of any kind nor enter the village. Further informing us that it was nine miles to the next village, he suggested the advisability of our returning to Koochan.

The old Khoord captain who was escorting us was much vexed, and urged us to return to a Koochan village, where we should be made welcome; but I was determined not to turn back, although, from the evident hostility of the people, it seemed very likely that we should be attacked. Accordingly I selected a defensible site for our camp, with the deep banks of the river protecting it on three sides. But we were much puzzled to account for this exhibition of hostility. Roostum, my Dereguez servant, knew this country well, and on consulting him he let a ray of light into the mystery. The Koochan and Boojnoord Governors, he informed me, were on very bad terms in consequence of the late quarrel with the Governor of Khorassan, the Boojnoord people having refused to join the Khoords of Koochan and Dereguez in case of matters coming to a crisis. Immediately it struck me that the hostility shown by the natives of Sissou, instead of being directed against us personally, might have been provoked by our having an armed escort from

Koochan. Thereupon I sent Roostum to see the headman of the village for the purpose of investigating and reporting on the matter. He soon returned with a message to this effect:—

"Tell the Englishmen that if they will send away their escort, this village and all that is in it is theirs."

Calling up the old Khoord captain, I explained that we must now send him back. He was a very fine old fellow, and was in great distress.

"Suppose I leave you alone here," he said, "and anything happens to you—what shall I do? You will be left here without friends, and you do not know how these people may act."

We tried to allay his fears; and finally it was agreed that, returning, he should wait for the night at the nearest Koochan village, to which we were to send a mounted messenger in the event of any difficulty arising. When the escort had departed, we again rode down to the village. The gates were open; the headman received us most courteously, and a very good room, which stood over the gateway of the village, was prepared for us; whilst supplies of all kinds were readily forthcoming.

The next day we marched for Boojnoord, still following the course of the river, and eventually leaving it suddenly, and striking due south through an opening in the mountain, which, we were told, was about nine miles from the town. A more important fort than any we had yet seen in these parts, and which, if it mounted guns, would command the Attrek valley, stood near the point of our departure from the stream. Next we came upon a small river, which rises in a beautifully clear spring gushing out of the side of the mountain, at a very pretty spot where some large trees gave shelter

from the sun; and, pushing on after breakfast, we at last came to a great plain surrounded by mountains. In the northern centre of this plain lay the important town of Boojnoord. We were still about four miles distant, when we were met by an escort of two hundred men, headed by a chief; and it was notified that a house had been prepared for us in the town, and also one outside, and that we could occupy whichever we liked. Choosing the latter, we were taken to a summer palace which had been occupied by the Shah on his visit here. It was a handsome building standing in a large garden, but we soon discovered that it would be very cold for this season of the year. From our escort, unfortunately, we obtained the particulars of an event which, I saw at once, would interfere most considerably with our plans. A chapaoul on a grand scale had just been made by the whole force of Boojnoord horsemen upon some Turkomans living on the Gourgan. The Boojnoord force had captured a large quantity of sheep and camels, but it had lost ten men killed and a good many wounded. Under these circumstances it would be difficult to get the large escort that we wanted for our expedition down the Attrek. Roostum, my servant, had repeatedly been down the Attrek from its rise to the Caspian. In fact, not many years ago he had spent months with a large force in clearing it of Turkomans; and he was positive that it could not be attempted with less than 800 men. I designed to try it with 200, if we could get them; but judged that, having just returned from a trying and long expedition, I should never persuade the Governor to give so many.

The next day the Governor, Yar Mahomed Khan, paid us a visit; and, on broaching the subject to him, the difficulty anticipated presented itself. But he offered

to forward us a part of the way, so far indeed that we could see where the river ran into the plains. Moreover, he entered most fully into our plans and maps, himself drawing up one for our inspection. It was the crudest idea of mapping that it is possible to conceive, and failed to convey any useful information. It was settled that we should cross the mountains and collect an increased escort in the most advanced Khoord villages, and also that, instead of returning to Boojnoord, we should make our way by Semulghan to Shohan, which would be on our way to Shahrood. Upon being told that we found our present residence very cold, and his permission sought to move into the town, the Governor immediately put a very fine house at our disposal; in fact, far the best we had occupied in Persia; and into it we moved on the same afternoon.

Recently we had been suffering from domestic difficulties. The cook and Aboo Cassim did not get on with Gerome, and there had been constant troubles; but now came a crisis. The cook, we discovered, had gone to the Governor's head-man and requested him, in our name, to furnish an immense quantity of supplies. Having obtained these, the two sold them and pocketed the proceeds. On this disclosure, Abdulla was very impudent, and rushed into our room in a most insolent manner; but left it more quickly than he entered. Aboo Cassim and he then went into the town and deserted. Ascertaining that they were going about, trying to excite a strong religious feeling against us and Gerome as infidels, which is always dangerous in a Mahomedan country, I reported them to the Governor, who declared that he would send them to prison for a week. The next morning they appeared for their wages, of which a small portion was due to them. We

paid them, although they were very impertinent; and, to their no small surprise, they were then marched off to the gaol.

We determined to send the greater number of the mules and baggage direct to Shohan, and to make our trip in light marching order.

November 8th.—We called upon the Governor and had a long conversation on the subject of the Attrek and the geography of the country. He had an unprepossessing manner, but was an intelligent man, and informed us that he was fond of reading, and made a particular study of the life of Peter the Great. Wine actually was served to us openly during our visit; but he told me that he drank only arrack or brandy himself, wine not being strong enough; and this was said before all his attendants. Neither before nor since have I ever met with so open and flagrant a violation of the Koran on the part of a Mahomedan. We arranged to start the next day, and the Governor begged us to call at his house, as he wished to give us two horses. I had to present him with my Purdey breechloading gun, for all our other presents were exhausted. We had even been obliged to purchase Gerome's gun for presentation to the Governor of Koochan.

In the morning, two Turkoman chiefs, who had come into Boojnoord to sell horses, visited us. They gave me an immensity of information relative to the country about Kizil Arvat and the slopes of the Kuren Dagh. These two chiefs, Imra Khan and Niaz Bahadur, were two of the largest Turkoman horse-dealers. I asked them how many horses they could supply of the class of my little grey 'Imaum,' only rather larger, at an average of 20*l.* They would undertake, they said, to deliver 1000 in ten days, or 15,000 in three months. This will give

some idea of the extent of the supply available in the Turkoman country.

They described the slopes of the Kuren Dagh, between Kizil Arvat and the point at which we had left them near Markuh, as being most fertile and well watered; and at Bishagan, a point a little south of Kariz, they represented the water-supply to be so great that thirty Turkoman villages were located there, with much cultivation. Niaz Bakadur was a splendid looking man, and had the reputation of being one of the greatest warriors of the Tekè Turkomans. They were most anxious to know whether England intended to let them be swallowed up by Russia, and asked me eagerly whether I had brought them a good message from our Government.

"What would you consider a good message?" I inquired. "What do you wish for from England?"

"We want to be under England," they replied. "That is the great wish of the Tekès. We do not want to be under Russia."

"But Hindostan is a long way from here," I said. "Afghanistan intervenes. How could you then be under England?"

To this they replied that Shere Ali was really a vassal of England. "He must do as she likes. We want to be in the same position, and we would do whatever England wished to defend the frontier."

"But you would not like being under Shere Ali?" was my next interrogation: to which they answered, "We should not mind; but we do not want to be under Russia or Persia."

I was obliged to say that we had no message to deliver to them, although they earnestly implored me to write a few lines to the effect that England would not

desert them, which they might take to Kourschid Khan at Merv.

Having dismissed them, a wretched old chestnut animal, perfectly valueless, appeared, which was said to be a present from the Governor. We heard that he had been imbibing freely and was not yet awake; so, leaving a civil message, we started on our way.

I purchased a rather fine specimen of the Khoord carpets at Boojnoord. They are cheap and pretty, rather thicker than the common Persian carpets known in England, and usually in quieter colours. The Turkoman productions, on the other hand, are distinct, being thicker and finer than the Khoord. The finer varieties of Turkoman carpets are very difficult to procure. Alayar Khan gave me one at Dereguez; but they are very rare, and to my mind not pretty, lacking the harmonious blending of brilliant colours which distinguishes the Persian.

We had a small escort of men under a chief named Ramazan Beg, whose village lay in the Monah valley. Marching north, we soon began the ascent of the mountains which separate the Boojnoord plains from the Attrek. We halted in the mountains for breakfast; and, to my surprise, although it was during the Ramazan, Ramazan Beg not only made a heavy meal but afterwards applied to us for some brandy, which he declined to dilute with water. Three times he came with the same request; and we were obliged at last to refuse, as I did not wish to travel about with a drunken Khoord chief during the Ramazan, to the scandal of all true believers, who would lay the whole blame upn the English infidels.

When we reached the head of the pass, I saw that by ascending the high peak of a neighbouring mountain we

should obtain a splendid view, so, sending the mules on, we rode to the summit. It was a very clear afternoon, and we could not have chosen a better site for observations. Looking northwards, the valley of the Attrek lay at our feet, and far as the eye could reach to the north-west lay an uninterrupted block of mountains. I have seen no country like it in any part of the world. An apparently endless mass of barren, rugged peaks. But, to our delight, to the north-east we recognised our old friend Markuh; and could see the whole range of the Kuren Dagh towering over the lower mountains, and could trace it all the way to Kizil Arvat. Above, Kizil Arvat stood a lofty peak, higher than its neighbours, and just above Bishagan, the peaks of the Kuren Dagh were also exceptionally high. Thus we confirmed the fact that we had discovered a great range of mountains, of from 8000 to 11,000 feet in height, unmarked on existing maps and previously unknown. We could not command a very extensive view of the course of the Attrek from this point, but a small mountain stream, the Chirinchi, ran into it here below us. On recent Russian maps this stream is marked as the Attrek; the Kuren Dagh range is ignored; and the Attrek is made to rise at Dereguez, and flow into the Monah valley. The Attrek is marked as the Russian boundary, and thus a large portion of Persian territory is quietly appropriated.

The Attrek ran through a broad fertile valley, the descent being gradual and the stream sluggish; winding very considerably, and with very deep banks. Much of the water being drawn off for irrigation, the river here is generally only about thirty feet wide, but it is deep in most places. There are numerous villages along both banks, and the extreme Persian village beyond it to the north, occupied by the Boojnoord Khoords, lies on the mountain-side, eight miles from the river.

We now descended until we were close to the stream, and eventually put up for the night at a small village. Ramazan Beg entertained us with a variety of stories, and pretended to have an intimate acquaintance with the whole country. Even in Persia, where truth is almost unknown, he was a perfect Prince of Liars. He assured us that about a year ago a Russian officer, accompanied by some Cossacks, had ridden up the Monah valley to the spot where we then were; that he—Ramazan Beg—had talked to the Russian officer; and he then described a fight between the Cossacks and the Turkomans. I made numerous inquiries afterwards as to the truth of this story, and learned that there was not the shadow of a foundation for it. When we said that Ramazan Beg had told us so, they exclaimed with a smile, "Ah! Ramazan Beg, of course!" However, he did find me rather a nice Turkoman carpet, which had been captured a few days before by a Khoord in the village. The history of this carpet will give some idea of the kind of life led on the border. About a week before, a Turkoman had come into the Monah village to trade, and amongst other things brought this carpet; but, wanting too much for it, he could not effect its sale. Some of the Khoords, discovering where he came from, assembled a few men, made a dash at the village at early dawn, killed the man, and got his carpet.

This sort of thing is of daily occurrence. Of course all the Khoord villages are fortified, while the Turkomans live in tents, as already described, and are therefore much more assailable; yet they manage to hold their own pretty equally. The Boojnoord Governor, we heard, had appropriated to his own use three-fourths of the cattle and spoil taken in the last foray. It was naturally to be expected that the Turkomans would soon make a return raid on a large scale. Then the Khoord

villagers would suffer, but the Governor would not be a penny the poorer. With an indolent, effete Government like that of Persia, it may easily be conceived how difficult it is to stop such a system, as the frontier Governors derive a large income from it. Moreover, the chief officials at Teheran often extort presents of great value from them; so that they also benefit; and an organized system of extortion prevails from the highest to the lowest. It is a shameful state of things. Ten thousand men properly commanded could hold the Persian line of frontier from the Caspian by Kizil Arvat to Sarakhs, and a few block-houses properly placed would prevent a single Turkoman from ever entering beyond the mountains. Yet many thousand square miles of Persian territory are either devastated or unoccupied, through the condition of terror induced by these raids, whilst at Teheran there are troops enough, in good order and armed with breech-loaders, to easily hold all of this now useless country. And, rather than exert herself to keep the Turkomans in order, Persia is apparently willing, without a remonstrance, to see this, the finest part of her territory, occupied by Russia; and England stands by, and, from want of geographical knowledge, is unaware that the spoliation is being accomplished, and imagines that Russia is only occupying forts in the desert, instead of a fertile and most important part of the Persian frontier.

November 10th.—Starting very early, we pushed down the valley to Pishcalla, which is the most advanced Khoord village. From here until it runs from these mountains on to the desert plains near its junction with the Simbur, that is, for nearly a hundred miles of its course, the Attrek flows through a broad fertile valley, which is sometimes eight or nine miles in width, but

occasionally closes in until it is a mere gorge. Yet, though water is plentiful and the soil fertile, not a village is to be found along its banks. It is a tract which both Khoords and Turkomans are afraid to inhabit, for its occupation by one side would immediately provoke a raid by the other. Wandering Turkomans flit about the valley, and here Turkoman chapaouls halt and refresh both before and after making raids into the Persian territory; and so dangerous is it considered, that the Khoords united with Roostum in declaring that it could not be safely traversed with less than 800 men. I believe that this is an exaggeration, and should have had no hesitation in attempting it with a quarter of that force; but the Khoords would not come.

Before entering Pishcalla, we had been met by the headman of that place, a magnificent specimen of a Khoord chief, who was mounted on the finest chesnut Turkoman that we had seen during the whole time that we were on this frontier. The horse attracted my special attention. He was clean thoroughbred, standing about 16.1, with great bone and power. Literally, there was not a fault to find with him; and, moreover, he had excellent action. But there is nothing quite perfect in this world, for his master told me that the noble animal was getting old, and for years had suffered from running sores in his legs which he could not cure, and which looked rather like the Indian disease *bursattee*. At one time the performances of this horse had been the pride of the country. I noticed that everyone looked very hard at the ugly animal that Alayar Khan had presented to me at Dereguez, and asked if they knew him?

"We know him well," was the reply. "We have faster horses; but, for a gallop of fifty miles, there are very few that can beat him. He is a celebrated Booj-

noord horse, and belonged to the Governor's son; but was taken by the Turkomans, and we heard afterwards that Alayar Khan had recaptured him."

Thus the kind chief had really given me one of his best horses, though it was of poor appearance. These horsemen of the Boojnoord district were mounted quite as well, if not better, than those of Dereguez and Koochan. Boojnoord can turn out about 1200 of them. In men, arms, and equipment they were of exactly the same class.

We intended to push down the valley as far as the Khoords would go. I had been promised one hundred men, but only about thirty turned up; and after proceeding some distance they positively refused to advance. They declared that the Turkomans, spying us from the mountains, would come down in large numbers and cut us off from Pishcalla. As they would not go farther we made them ascend a high peak on the left bank, from which we could get good observations. From this peak we had a very fine view, and could trace the Attrek along its whole course, until it ran from the mountains into the plains. Numerous streams fed it both on the right and on the left bank; but from the general formation of the mountains I am convinced that there are many other streams, besides the Simbur, which run down from the mountains between the junction of that river with the Attrek and Kizil Arvat; and that the country in that neighbourhood, which is distinctly Persian soil and guarded by very old Persian forts, but which the Russians are now about to occupy, will be found to be highly cultivated and well watered.

Roostum, who was by my side, and knew every yard of the Attrek below this point, described it to me; and, as I found him always accurate in his descriptions of

places that we afterwards visited, I have no doubt that his account was correct. In the broad open vales that we saw, wild asses, he said, were to be found in immense numbers, whilst in the reed-beds which fringed the river, and in some places were of very considerable extent, wild boar abounded. Just before its descent into the desert the Attrek runs through a gorge, where it is more rapid; but generally it is rather sluggish, and of the same character as its course in the Monah valley, growing larger, however, as it continues to be fed by the rivers that run into it, and which will be found marked and named on our map. After its descent into the plains it often opens out into wide marshes covered with reeds, sometimes so large that it is difficult to trace the course of the river. In many places it is fordable in the summer, but even at that season horses can only just cross it without swimming. As it runs to the Caspian it contracts from the evaporation in the desert. This may account for the statement made to me by Colonel Stebnitski, who surveyed its lower course, that it was no more than twelve yards wide at the part where he followed it.

From our position on this peak we commanded a perfect view of the whole of this great block of mountains, extending right away from Markuh in the east, to Kizil Arvat in the north, and to the high mountains which separate the Attrek and the Gourgan in the west. Let me try to give the reader a clear view of this little-known region, which is now becoming of so much importance, and which is written about with such vague ideas of its geographical features.

The great range of mountains which lies to the south of the Caspian, and of which Demavend forms the highest peak, runs just south of Astrabad and the

Gourgan river; but about sixty miles from Astrabad the range becomes broken and several passes occur; and about 100 miles from Astrabad it turns suddenly to the north-east, the mountains at this point becoming much lower, and falling as it were into a succession of ridges running generally east and west. Through these ridges run the Attrek, the Simbur, and, I believe, other streams.* These characteristics continue to Kizil Arvat, when it suddenly turns to the south-east, making Kizil Arvat the apex of this vast mountain block; and it continues this south-eastern course to Markuh, when it turns to the E.S.E., and so continues with slight variation to Sarakhs, and on by the Afghan frontier.

The whole triangular block thus thrown out is one mass of broken mountain, utterly uncultivated, and with no paths by which even a Turkoman can make his way without leading his horse. The water-shed of this block, with the exception of the actual north-east slopes of the Kuren Dagh, is all to the west, and the Attrek and Simbur receive the numerous feeders; but I feel sure there are others, though they may not be of equal importance. The north-east slopes, as already mentioned, are well watered by numerous mountain streams. South of this triangular block lie several

* Burnes writes as follows of the country on the Gourgan: — "At length we cleared the valley of the Goorgan river, and debouched upon the plain eastwards of the Caspian. The landscape was very imposing. To our left the hills, now running in range, rose to a great height, clad to the summit with forest trees and foliage. To our right the extensive plains, which are watered by the rivers Attrek and Goorgan, and richly verdant, were studded with innumerable encampments of Turkomans, and diversified by flocks and herds. In our front, at a distance, we descried the lofty mountains of Elboorz, that seemed to shut up an otherwise boundless plain. Such a scene would have delighted anyone, much more a wanderer from the deserts of Scythia."

ranges of high mountains, all running nearly due east and west; which indeed is the peculiar feature of all northern Persia. Thus, to get into the country before described in the neighbourhood of Meyomeed and Abasabad, the Turkomans have to advance through passes in these mountain chains; and yet the Persians will not take the trouble to place block-houses and a few infantry in each of the passes, and there are not many. Where there are no passes there are no Turkomans, for they dislike the mountains and cling closely to the plains; but they assemble in the Attrek valley, dash through on to the great level country between Jah Jerm and Meyomeed, and there lie in wait. Having made their captures, they will then gallop back and reach the Attrek again, marching for 100 or 120 miles, without stopping for more than a few minutes at a time.

Returning to Pishcalla just before dark, we remained there for the night.

November 11th.—Our course was south-west on leaving the Monah valley and the Attrek, and we struck into the plains of Semulghan. These plains are separated from the Monah valley and Attrek by a range of low mountains, and to the west of Semulghan stands a high detached mountain, the highest within a circuit of a hundred miles. We now came across the curious feature before noticed in Mazanderan, that some of the mountain slopes were wooded towards the north. We reached Shahabad (thirteen miles) early in the day; and, hearing that there was very good pheasant shooting near at hand, G—— and I went out in the afternoon. We saw very few pheasants, but a good many partridges; and being now reduced, by the process of giving presents, to my single-barrelled duck-gun, it proved very awkward at partridges.

CHAPTER XVII.

Shohan—Sanghos—Jah Jerm—Riabad—Magas—Bostam—Shahrood.

November 12th.—Shohan was our next destination. After crossing a mountain range to the south by a very bad road, we entered a well-watered valley. We had crossed the range at a very considerable height, and from a lofty peak confirmed our former observations. Then, again ascending another high range, we obtained a most extensive view to the south. Although 100 miles distant from Meyomeed, we could quite clearly see the two mountains beyond it, and could plainly distinguish a conical mountain which lies over thirty miles farther to the south. The clearness of the atmosphere in Persia during the summer and autumn is quite extraordinary. We descended to Shohan, which lay below us, by one of the worst roads we had traversed during the whole of our journey. G—— and I, who were riding horses, were obliged to dismount—a thing we had rarely done before. Cremorne and G——'s black pony would certainly have obviated this necessity; but, riding the Dereguez horse, I had the narrowest escape of going down the mountain side.

On our arrival at Shohan (twenty-one miles) the mules from Boojnoord were awaiting us, and also a

messenger from Abbas Khan at Meshed, with a post-bag containing letters and newspapers from England. The messenger declared he had been robbed, and all his clothes taken from him, but the thieves had kindly left our letters intact; and amongst these was a letter written by C—— from St. Petersburg, giving us the date at which the last steamer from Enzelli would run on the Caspian before the setting-in of the ice. We now found that we had no time to spare, and that we must push on more rapidly unless we were prepared either to remain in Persia through the winter, or to take the long southern route by Ispahan, Shiraz and Bushire. This was annoying, as we had heard of excellent shooting at the next station, Sanghos, where we had made up our minds to stay for a few days. But our geographical explorations were now nearly completed. We should soon be moving over known ground; and after our long and dreary wanderings a strong desire set in to hurry back to the civilized world.

November 13th.—Sanghos, a march of eighteen miles, was our next stage. The way led over a large plain until approaching Sanghos, and then through a pass. Here again was a range of mountains running east and west. These were about 8000 feet in height, quite green with verdure, and freely dotted with juniper-trees. Unlike most of the ridges, some of these mountains stand almost detached, and the passes between them are only from 1000 to 2000 feet above the plain. We were informed that they swarmed with ibex.

In crossing the plain between Shohan and Sanghos we came across a number of the large bustard, a magnificent bird as big as a peacock. We were civilly received on our arrival and taken to a charming house, perfectly new, and evidently never yet occupied. A considerable escort

was also promised for the next day's journey to Jah Jerm, as the Turkomans are sometimes troublesome along this route. Sanghos would probably make one of the best head-quarters for sport in Northern Persia. Here anyone might get good ibex and moufflon-shooting in the mountains just above the town; plenty of wild asses on the plains, about six miles to the south; and splendid pig-sticking, if it were properly organized. The large bustard also, and a bird about the size of the capercailzie, which we were unable to recognise, abound in the neighbourhood. It is of a red-brown with whitish wings; and we saw immense numbers in the cultivated fields about here. The people told us they were very good to eat.

Our cook and Abbas, we discovered, had been released from prison directly we left Boojnoord; but they had been fleeced of their money by the officials of that place. They now turned up at Sanghos.

November 14*th*.—To Jah Jerm was a march of thirty-two miles; and being told that we were certain on the way to see wild asses, which we had determined to try and ride down, it was evident that the horses would have a long day. We therefore started before daybreak. About four miles from Sanghos we passed a large village, the only one between that place and Jah Jerm. The range of mountains already mentioned lay to our right, and to our left extended a great plain about ten miles broad, bounded on the south by another low range. Through the centre of this plain ran a sluggish stream, its banks studded with tamarisks, reeds, and low bushes. Here, it was said, we should find the gourkher, or wild ass. The people also reported that wild boar abounded in this cover, and that they came to the cultivated ground near the village every night, returning in the early morning.

As it is about six miles to their covert, and the beautiful sandy plain is excellent galloping ground, it may be imagined what an excellent site for pig-sticking this place affords. We despatched scouts to look out for gourkher, while we went after some antelope that we saw on the left of the road. On our return, one of the men reported wild asses near the brackish stream about four miles off. When we arrived there they were gone; but we came across numberless fresh tracks, proving that they were very plentiful. The tracks were curious, and looked as if the whole herd had followed each other in Indian file. The ground was good, but rather heavy going, being covered with a salt sandy crust, through which the horses' feet sank at each stride; and near the brackish gully it was very rough and broken, though quite rideable.

We had not proceeded far, when we came suddenly upon a herd of fourteen gourkher; but they took the alarm when we were within a third of a mile of them, and went away at a good pace. The men of our escort had been bragging all the morning about their great feats of horsemanship, and how they constantly rode down the gourkher; and we were anxious to see how they would perform. I was riding 'Imaum,' and G—— was on the bay horse that he had bought at Meshed. The wild asses halted for a moment, and we got within a quarter of a mile of them; then off they started again at a great pace. I saw that we were gaining upon them steadily though slowly, and that it was simply a question of staying power. G—— was riding on the left, and I upon the right; and at last we got within about 300 yards, after which our advantage increased very slowly. The wild asses now made for the rough bushy ground near the stream, and in going over

this they gained a slight advantage. On, on we went for more than half an hour. At one time I was within 200 yards, when they suddenly crossed the nullah, which was deep; and, by the time I got over, it was evident that 'Imaum' had gone quite far enough, and that it would be useless to persevere. On looking back we saw that the whole of our escort were completely tailed off. Roostum on 'Cremorne' was the only man within half a mile of us. G——'s horse was nearly as much done as 'Imaum,' and we halted and dismounted; after an interval, striking away for the Jah Jerm road. We now saw plenty of gourkher, but the horses were not fit to try again, and, besides, we had long marches before us.

My Dereguez horse was in reserve, and I was very anxious to see whether he was worthy of his renown; but, of course, the stupid horsekeeper had not kept near us, and was nowhere to be found. We had come much farther than we imagined, and it took a long time to get back to the track; when it became a question whether we were ahead of, or behind, the mules. After a time, however, we saw them coming up in the distance, and marched on with them. The escort had become much scattered, but there were some armed villagers on foot with the mules.

It was a long time before my horsekeeper appeared, and the afternoon was drawing to a close; but, getting on to the Dereguez horse, I struck off unattended into the plains. The men pointed out the tracks where some Turkomans had passed that morning; and begged me to keep a sharp look-out. After going about two miles, I espied some gourkher; but they had already been alarmed, and were moving very fast, unfortunately, in the opposite direction to Jah Jerm. The temp-

tation, however, was strong, and away I went in pursuit. My hitherto neglected horse now proved himself to be well worthy of his reputation. He was extraordinarily fast, and went like a steam-engine, as though he would never stop. After riding about three miles and gaining upon the wild asses hand over hand, I became aware of some small parties of men who were evidently stalking me, though at a distance of about a mile; and I saw that if I persevered they would get between me and Jah Jerm. Pulling up, therefore, I was compelled to retrace my steps, to avoid being cut off. I knew that I was so well mounted that, by preventing this manœuvre, there was but little chance of their catching me; and, having just given Dereguez his wind for a moment, I sent him along at a good rattling pace in the direction of Jah Jerm. They followed for three or four miles, and then gave up the pursuit.

Evening was just falling when we reached the remains of cultivated ground near Jah Jerm. This was of great extent, and showed that the place had once been of considerable importance. There were any number of the Turkoman towers, already described, dotted about in all directions; many hundreds of them, and more than we had seen in the neighbourhood of any other town.

Jah Jerm, which is a fine specimen of one of the old earthen forts, stands well, guarding a broad pass in the mountains, through which the Turkoman marauders nevertheless manage constantly to make their way. One field-gun is stationed at this fort, but, as the Turkomans pass it at night, this is of little use.

Finding that two routes conducted to Shahrood, one more to the north by Nardin, where Afrasiab Khan holds the command as Governor, and one by Riabad, we

adopted the road to the south, and marched to Riabad (forty-two miles). A range of mountains still extended to our right; to our left was a broad plain; and three successive low ranges in the far distance interposed between us and the Shahrood-Meshed road. But these terminated, and we could then see nothing but plain soon right away to Meyomeed, about forty miles. After marching fourteen miles we came to a pass through the mountains to our right which, we were told, was frequented by the Turkomans. It was not 100 yards broad, and in the centre of it stood a small old earth-fort, but unoccupied by troops. Here was a little stream of good water. About thirteen miles farther on, we came upon the ruins of a curious old fort surrounded by the remains of gardens. It was of brick, and inlaid in parts with blue enamelled tiles. Here was another stream, and the place was occupied by a solitary shepherd, who for some unknown reason was never molested by the Turkomans. Having observed the quite fresh tracks of a Turkoman party on the road before us, we marched with every precaution; but neither were we attacked, nor did we see anything of them. It was getting dark when we reached Riabad, a most wretched place, where we had to put up over a stable. We had not passed a single village between this and the outskirts of Jah Jerm.

We were now only sixty-seven miles from Shahrood, and I determined to accomplish the distance in one day. Meshedi Hassan, when consulted, declared that his mules would manage it. After Magas (forty miles away), there would be no fear of Turkomans, as we should soon afterwards be on the Bostam plains. Starting, therefore, at two o'clock in the morning, we marched over a most drearily desolate country. For thirty miles there was

not a sign of a village, and no water. Then we came to two wretched little places, and here, Magas being visible in the distance, we dismissed the greater part of our escort. Before us, and on our right, was the main mountain range lying north of Bostam and Shahrood; and south of the Bostam plains on this side runs a low range of hills, to the south of which lay Magas, a large village of flourishing appearance. Here we halted for breakfast, the mules having fallen behind. I was feeling very unwell. An attack of fever was coming on that was destined to prove very troublesome.

The mules arrived just as we were on the point of starting; and, knowing now that they would be quite safe, we determined to march the intervening distance at a good pace, so as to get to Shahrood before dark. Although our horses had lately been doing hard work, they were as fresh as possible; so, putting Roostum in front on 'Cremorne,' we told him to lead at exactly the pace they are accustomed to maintain when returning from a Turkoman *chapaoul*. Accordingly he led at a slow, steady gallop, an excellent pace for getting over the ground; and at this rate he said they often go fifty or sixty miles without stopping. When we reached the plains of Bostam there was so much cultivation that we lost the track, and had to cross some very rough ground before we could recover it. A good stream ran through the plains, the same which afterwards passes Budusht, from which the caravan had started on our journey to Meshed. By the time we reached Bostam I was very unwell; but 'Imaum,' although he had gone over 160 miles in this and the two previous days, was so fresh that he would not go quietly, and we galloped the four miles into Shahrood at a fast pace. 'Cremorne' ran away with Roostum just when we reached the town; and this occurred,

be it noted, at the end of sixty-seven miles. Here we soon found our old friend, the civil head-man of Shahrood, with whom we had left part of the large tent and other things. We put up at the *chapar hanè*, or post-house; which we had no sooner reached than a regular attack of fever and ague supervened, and I passed a wretched night.

The Russian commercial agent here urged us to push on if we wished to catch the last steamer of the year on the Caspian.

It is curious that the Russians, with no aptitude for trade, should have a perfect passion for extending their commerce throughout Central Asia. It may be urged that this is a mere blind, and that, noting the results of our commercial settlements in Hindostan, it forms a mere prelude and pretence for conquest. I do not think that this is the case, although the argument is plausible. Most of the Russian Central Asian trade is carried on by Armenians, and the Armenian is sharper in his dealings than the Jew. Moreover, Russia, when she has the power, invariably excludes all foreign goods by prohibitive duties. With fairly even means of communication she could never hold her own against England; but late English Governments have had so great a dread of responsibility that they have virtually closed Afghanistan as an outlet for British commerce, and the whole trade of Central Asia is slowly drifting into Russian hands.

We had determined to leave our mules, baggage, and horses behind in the charge of Meshidi Hassan, to come on by regular stages, whilst we rode post to Teheran. Gerome, Roostum, and Zenil Abdeen, G——'s servant, were to accompany us. I expected that I should be well enough to start the next day, though perhaps a little weak; so we arranged to go only two stages, Deh Mollah

and Damghan. At twelve o'clock at night Meshidi Hassan came in with the baggage. This was very good work for the mules, for sixty-seven miles is a long journey for these animals. The muleteers had marched all the way. There was so much to be arranged, that it was midday before we left, and we bade good-bye to Meshidi Hassan, Ismail, and all those who had followed our fortunes so far, as we knew that we should leave Teheran before their arrival.

The post-ponies were wretched animals. G——'s came down before we were clear of the town. And here let me explain the system of riding post in Persia. This can only be done on the main roads, such as Teheran to Meshed, or from Teheran to Ispahan, Tabreez or Reshdt. There are *chapar hanès*, or post-houses, at stations varying much in distance, but generally about twenty-five or thirty miles apart. At each of these stations some five or six wretched ponies are kept, and, if you have an order from Government, you can get relays at each post-house upon paying for the same. Miserable as these animals usually are, they are in such hard condition, that you can reckon upon doing the journey at the rate of from six to seven miles an hour. But it sometimes happens that there are no post-ponies at the next station; in which case, after a rest, the same animals have to do another journey. The ponies seem to be aware of this contingency. I have never ridden a Hampstead donkey, but I should say it was a willing steed compared to the usual *chapar* pony of Persia. Of course, occasionally we came across an exception to the rule, and I have met with some excellent animals, 'Cremorne' for example; but usually both whip and spurs are requisite to get along, and one feels ashamed at the amount of both that is absolutely necessary. Riding

chapar, to be done pleasantly, should only be attempted by two persons and a servant, who should ride on ahead to order the horses to be ready. Europeans riding *chapar* usually travel about seventy miles a day, sleeping at the *chapar hanès* at night; but by riding night and day, as the couriers do who carry the Legation post-bags from Teheran to Trebizond, much longer distances can of course be accomplished. Unless a messenger goes on ahead, a long time is always lost in getting the horses ready. We generally reckoned upon a delay of nearly an hour at each post-house.

We did the short journey to Deh Mollah very quickly, but there the fresh ponies wanted shoeing. It was quite dark when we arrived within four miles of Damghan, and we had some difficulty in finding our way. At last we discovered the gate and entered through a covered passage, about one hundred yards long, and lighted by small oil-lamps. I had another attack of fever on my arrival, and felt very unwell; but got better towards morning, although I could not obtain rest. We started at 4.30. Our first stage was to Goocheh (thirty-two miles). After the first twelve miles, which are well watered, the country is level, barren, and uninteresting; no more water is found, and only a small supply at Goocheh. The next stage was to Aheyoon (thirty-four miles), and there was no water all the way; but we had a fairly level road until nearing Aheyoon, when some rocky hills have to be ascended. To our dismay we found no fresh ponies at the station, and, after resting there for about two hours, had to ride on the same animals to Semnoon, thirty miles more. Just beyond Aheyoon there is a pass, and a rather hilly road leads up to within seven miles of Semnoon, which lies on a large plain and is a very considerable town.

Between Aheyoon and Semnoon a fresh attack of fever came on, and before we reached the latter place I was completely exhausted and obliged to hold on by the mane of the pony. We got a little water at the outskirts of the town, and I just managed to reach the *chapar hanè*, but then had to be lifted off the pony and carried into the post-house. This was a bad attack, and it was very annoying, as it seemed impossible that I could get on next day. G—— sent to the head-man to try to get some mules and a tracteravan to carry me by easy stages; but, although he promised mules, he could find no tracteravan.

Having taken quantities of quinine, I felt better in the early morning, so, waking up G——, we agreed to make an easy day of it. We started at 7.30. The first stage was to Lasjird (thirty-two miles). There are several villages about Semnoon, with the remains of a large town, and a good stream of water about nineteen miles from Semnoon. There is a small pass at Lasjird, and the village is built on the site of an old fort. The next stage was to Dehnamuck (thirty-two miles). About eleven miles from Lasjird there is a well. I got on all right, having ridden seventy-four miles without another attack of fever. We were now only 122 miles from Teheran, and I determined to try and reach it the next day. Accordingly we started at two o'clock in the morning with a guide, not being able ourselves to make out the road in the dark, and riding fast at night over the rough ground was very awkward work. Our guide himself had three falls before day broke.

Near the first station, Kishlak, we passed through a rich district. Here the river Garjerood runs down from the mountain, and, branching into numberless channels, irrigates a vast alluvial plain, producing great fertility.

The next stage to Eywanee Keij was through a defile in the mountains. A long ridge runs to the south from the main chain, and by passing through this defile a considerable circuit is avoided. A salt stream ran through it, the banks of which were encrusted with pure salt. We got to Eywanee Keij in good time, and hoped to reach Teheran by about eight o'clock in the evening; but there was a long delay in getting horses, and as they proved very indifferent, it was nearly dusk when we reached the last stage before Teheran. G—— and I had got ahead of the servants, and here again occurred a long delay. I was very weak, but we got a guide and pushed on rapidly until it grew dark. Then the road became so bad that we could not proceed out of a walk, and the ponies were pitching on to their heads continually. I shall never forget that night's ride.

I was miserably ill and utterly exhausted, being often obliged to cling round the pony's neck, for I could not sit up in the saddle; and the journey seemed interminable. Several villages on the outskirts of Teheran were passed, but it seemed as if we should never reach Teheran itself. What agony I endured! And with what a feeling of relief did we welcome the gate of the town, when we came upon it suddenly in the darkness at about eleven o'clock! But the gate was closed, and the guard refused to open it. They said they had not the key, and could not admit us without an order. However, some money being passed to them under the gate, they agreed to send off a man to the commandant. The night was bitterly cold; and, to add to our miseries, it began to rain. The men of the guard thrust some dry firewood under the gate, and G—— lighted a fire. Utterly exhausted, I lay in the rain, and dozed. It was two hours before they brought the keys. Curiously enough,

we could not find anyone to tell us the way to the British Legation; and a man, who offered to be our guide, took us to the building that used to be occupied by the Legation before the new house was built.

We wandered about for two hours, and at last found ourselves in the bazaar. Here, as it was the Ramazan, some people were up; and at a coffee-house that was open we succeeded in getting some tea. At length we met a man who knew the Turkish Embassy; and thither we repaired. They would be able, I thought, at least to direct us. It was now three o'clock in the morning, and when we reached the Turkish Embassy we could not wake any of the inmates. Wandering on in a hopeless state, I suddenly recognised the peculiar wall of the Legation garden. At last we were all right after our long and trying journey, back again with our own countrymen, and sure of a hearty English welcome. We had been twenty-six hours on the road. We proceeded to the house of Mr. Smyth, the Secretary to the Legation, and, although we woke him from his sleep and gave him endless trouble, he was kindness itself; and in less than an hour the exhausted inner man had been refreshed, and we were sleeping comfortably in real beds.

How we appreciated the comfort of a good English bed after being absent from that luxury for months! Chairs, tables, and such like articles, usually considered necessaries of life, appeared to us now as extraordinary luxuries. Everything in this world is comparative; and what little things will give extreme pleasure when we have been long deprived of them!

G—— put up permanently with Mr. Smyth; but Mr. Thomson, the Minister, who had been my kind host for so long a time at Gulhek, had left word that

a room was ready for me at the Legation; and in the afternoon I revelled in comfortable rooms, easy chairs, and late newspapers. We luxuriated in rest; and, although in one's dreams at night the everlasting tinkle of the mule-bells still seemed to sound in the ears, it was delicious to wake to a totally different scene from that we had been so long accustomed to. Instead of toil, and dirt, and fleas, one lay in clean sheets and a comfortable bed. Then a well-served breakfast and white table-cloth brought back all the delights of civilization; and at night, when we sat down to a good dinner in evening dress, with a pleasant party of our own countrymen, the past seemed almost like a dream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Teheran — Kasvin — Reshdt — Enzelli — Lenkoran — Baku—Derbend—Stavropol—Rostow—Moscow—St. Petersburg.

THE Shah had returned; but we had with us only the things we had carried in our saddle-bags. Our wardrobe therefore was very limited, and I declined to ask for an audience. We spent the four days that we could afford to remain in Teheran in a state of perfect and blissful quiet. Sir J. Dickson, doctor to the Embassy, took me in hand, and I soon felt much better. We paid a visit to the bazaar, where we made a few purchases. The bazaars of Teheran are an endless source of interest and amusement. Our good friends the Pearsons had started for England; Dr. Baker was as kind and hospitable as ever; and we were very sorry to leave our host, but the 25th had arrived, and, bidding good-bye to all at Teheran, we had to start away, riding post to Enzelli, to catch the steamer.

The journey was only about 220 miles, and we expected to do it easily in three days; but we left a margin of forty-eight hours to provide for accidents, as this was the last steamer of the year, and to miss it would be disastrous. We had next to part with all the servants except Gerome. Roostum had behaved very well, and I gave him 'Cremorne.' He had ridden the

good pony ever since we left Dereguez, and was very fond of him. He followed us out of the town to see the last of me, and then we pushed rapidly on, as it was late in the afternoon, and we wanted to reach the first post-station before dark. The stages on this road were not so long as those we had been accustomed to ; but since our arrival at Teheran the rains had set in, and the whole face of the country was altered. The great range of mountains that still ran at our right was covered with snow, and where, only a few weeks before, no water could have been found, foaming watercourses ran, requiring constantly to be waded.

We started early next morning and rode three stages, when, to my distress, another attack of fever came on, and we had to halt for the night. The following morning we were off again, and reached Kasvin in time for breakfast.

Kasvin, once an important town containing 100,000 inhabitants, lies at the junction of the roads from Reshdt and Tabreez. It was in the hills near here that the "Old Man of the Mountain," or Chief of the Assassins, is supposed to have lived. The means by which he succeeded in forming this infamous sect are curious. He is reported to have enclosed a garden and peopled it with mortal Houris and all the delights of a Mahomedan Paradise. Young men were drugged and conveyed when asleep to this spot, and after a time redrugged and returned to their homes. They were then promised a return to the abode of bliss if they executed the stern decrees of the chief.

Up to this point we had been following the plains, with the great Elburz range to our right, and in fact the main route to Tabreez ; but the Reshdt road, striking off to the right at Kasvin, soon enters and crosses the

mountains in order to reach the Caspian. It was not until passing the post-station beyond Kasvin that we were fairly in the mountains. At this, the sixth station from Teheran we heard of a good village, about fourteen miles beyond; and as I still felt able to go on, though very weak, we pushed forward. Between this station and the village we crossed the highest point of the pass, and just then a bitterly cold storm came on. Before we could reach the village I had a violent attack of fever, and had to be supported from my pony to the house of the head-man, which was immediately placed at our disposal. I shall not forget this kind old man, for any show of good feeling is rare in Persia. I have a dim but grateful recollection of his lighting a fire, rolling me up in rugs, and patiently rubbing my feet by way of promoting circulation, when I was shivering in the aguish stage of the fever.* I began to get seriously uneasy about missing the steamer; and it seemed so hard that poor G—— should be delayed on my account.

* Baillie Fraser thus speaks of the Persian character:—"The oppression and injustice of their superiors have produced the worst moral effect on the Persian peasantry. They are devoid of truth and all its attributes, candour, frankness, and honesty. They are treacherous and deceitful, deficient in gratitude, and all the more amiable dispositions of the mind. To protect themselves from extortion, they resort to fraud and untruths. Unchecked by any principle inculcated in youth, nay, encouraged by the example of their superiors, they possess themselves unscrupulously of the property of others. They are, perhaps, not naturally cruel, but the little value set upon human life, and the acts of cruelty so frequently committed before their eyes, by their rulers, have familiarized them with bloodshed; they are but too apt to draw the knife on slight occasions; and were it not for the fear of consequences, their frays would often be fatal.

"The valuable qualities of the Persian peasantry are confined, it is to be feared, to their activity and intelligence, and these they certainly possess. In some situations, where they are further removed from the malign influence and tyranny of their rulers, they are said to possess more independence and blunt honesty; and this I hope and believe to be the case, although I am little able to confirm it on the strength of experience."

I had always prided myself upon being able to ride indefinite distances without feeling fatigue, but was now so weak and feeble that I could not do seventy miles in the day, without an attack of fever. The next day I was still so ill that I could only ride to the foot of the pass, a distance of about thirty miles.

November 29th.—We hoped to ride into Reshdt, as I was better. We traversed a very pretty road following the course of a considerable river. The barren mountains had given place to a beautiful diversity of rock, wood and water; and near the eighth station the country became thickly wooded, with all the features of the Mazanderan northern slopes. The higher mountains were covered with snow, and the scenery was quite lovely. The road was in bad order from the rains, and I had the most impracticable pony. It was a far greater exertion to me to get him along than for him to carry me. We were nearing the last station before Reshdt, when another violent attack of fever came on; but I was just able to get to the post-station. This lay in the middle of the jungle, and there was a wild boar quietly walking about in a little open clearing not one hundred yards off. I was past shooting, however, and had to be helped into the *chapar hanè*.

G——, who was afraid I should not be able to get on the next day, now rode into Reshdt for the purpose of procuring a tracteravan to carry me. Once or twice he had urged my being carried, but I had persisted in being able to ride to the Caspian. Before the tracteravan arrived in the morning, I was able to ride into Reshdt, where we were most kindly received by our Consul, Captain Abbott, and his wife, who put us up and did their utmost to make us comfortable.

Reshdt is a very feverish place, but it would be a

paradise for a sportsman during the months of October, November and December. Red-deer and tigers are found in the great woods, and wild boar in immense numbers. The inland water of Enzelli swarms with wild fowl, and there is also very good pheasant-shooting in the neighbourhood. The scenery is charming; and in November, looking south at the range of snow-covered mountains from the great Enzelli backwater, and at the beautiful forest-slopes tinted with many colours, with the waters of the great inland bay as a foreground, it leaves little to be desired.

I had heard of the wild-fowl shooting at Enzelli; and, having a passion for duck-punting, had taken out an India-rubber boat, and made other preparations for this sport before leaving England. But now I was obliged to give up all idea of sport, for I was too unwell to attempt it. We were advised that we ought to be at Enzelli the next day, as the steamer might after that be expected at any moment. At Reshdt unusual excitement prevailed; for the short line of railway, which was to be the commencement of Baron Reuter's gigantic scheme for the reorganization of Persia, was just completed, and the engineers employed in surveying the extension of the line to Kasvin and Teheran were often here, and gave new life to this generally quiet place. We met a Mr. Jenner at the Abbotts', who was employed under Baron Reuter, and had led a curious and adventurous life, having served under Garibaldi in Italy, then in the Turkish army, and afterwards in Persia.

December 1st.—After breakfast we started to ride to Peribazaar (five miles), whence we were to proceed by boat to Enzelli. I was very ill in the morning, a fresh attack of fever coming on; but, having ridden nearly 600 miles since the first attack, was determined to

complete the last five miles; and we rode off with Capt. and Mrs. Abbott. But it was not to be. I had not gone a mile, when I could no longer sit upon my pony, and was carried into the house of the Governor of Reshdt. After waiting a few hours until the most violent paroxysms had passed, a tracteravan was procured, and I was carried to Peribazaar, and there deposited in the boat. The whole scene is confused and blurred in my memory, but I recollect trying to raise myself in the boat to see some wild swans that were not far off; and that was all I saw of the famous wild-fowl ground of Northern Persia.

We slept at a very nice house at Enzelli, and early the next morning the steamer 'Constantine' was reported in sight. On going on board we found our old friend in the Russian navy who had so kindly put us up at Ashourada. We started in the afternoon. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the view from the deck of the steamer. Enzelli lay in the foreground on a narrow strip of land, picturesque and well-wooded; and the back-water of Enzelli stretched beyond like a vast lake; whilst the bend in the Caspian towards the north formed a semicircle of lofty mountains, whose bases were covered with forest and exhibited the beautiful autumn tints, their rugged peaks being all white with snow. We said good-bye to our kind host, Captain Abbott; the paddle-wheels revolved slowly, and we were off.

As we gazed at the lovely view before us we bade farewell to Persia.

When we thought of all those dreary journeys through arid, burning wastes, of the dreadful monotony of those long and trying marches, with the same endless recurrence of sandy plains and rocky peaks, and of the

utter absence of colour to relieve the eye from the ever-present dusty hue that girt both hill and valley, this lovely scene seemed like a beautiful mirage sent to charm our thoughts from the past, and to leave a last and false impression of Persian beauty.

The next morning, when we woke, we were anchored at Lenkoran. The sea air had driven away the fever, and G—— and I immediately went on shore, as the captain said we should not start until the evening. We found a modest hotel, at which we got some breakfast, and, hiring a carriage, drove away to the north. About three miles from the town, on the left of the road, we came to a little lake covered with reeds. A man in a small canoe was cutting them, and the whole place swarmed with snipe. If you threw a stone amongst the reeds, four or five would rise immediately. I never saw such numbers. We drove on some distance to another lake, but saw very few ducks, though the natives declared that at night the place was covered with them; which I could believe. We did not leave until late in the evening; when a violent storm came on, and some of the passengers and ship's officers who were on shore were nearly drowned in coming off, for the native boatmen got frightened and would not stick to their oars.

The next afternoon we were steaming into Baku, and again found ourselves at the Hôtel Dominique. It was now a question how we should return. The steamer did not go farther north than Baku. We had the choice, therefore, either of posting over the old road we had traversed 400 miles to Tiflis, and so home by the Black Sea, as we had come, or of posting 800 miles over the steppes to Rostov, and thence taking the railway to Moscow and St. Petersburg. We were warned that it

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was rather late in the year for this journey, and that we might be caught in the violent snow-storms which make these steppes at times very dangerous in winter. But it was new ground, and one quite dreaded that monotonous drive to Tiflis over again. So we bought a tarantasse, which (as before described) is a little phaeton with a hood, but with no seats inside. Then we got two mattresses, and endless skins and rugs. I had found thick coats waiting for me at Reshdt, and plenty of the warmest clothing, which had been left there during our trip. Altogether it seemed that we might defy any amount of cold. Gerome, who had invested in the warm coats of the country, now appeared with the aspect of a Tartar. We paid a visit to Madame S——, in the absence of the Governor, who was away in Tiflis; and having kindly received from the Russian authorities an order for post-horses all along the route, we started on the afternoon of the second day. Supplies had been laid in for the journey, as we heard that we should get nothing, except in the few large towns, along the road. Among other provisions, we purchased at Baku some excellent white Crimean wine that was very cheap. It is well worthy of introduction to England.

We were determined to travel night and day, and were told that it would take eight days, owing to the frequency of the stoppages. I had hoped to pass through the mountains of Lesghia, but the road follows the plains near the Caspian, and the mountains are only seen in the distance. G—— was sadly afraid that my health would break down, but the sea air had done me much good, and I felt quite strong again. There were no springs to our little carriage, and the roads were rough. Under these circumstances our powers of digestion were not equal to heavy meals; so we lived almost entirely upon figs,

biscuits and Crimean wine; upon which diet we got on famously.

Early on the morning of the second day we were at Derbend on the Caspian, a quaint old place with a wall running from the town to the neighbouring mountains, and thus closing the pass. There are curious old towers still standing along this wall, and it is altogether a very interesting place. We pushed forward, and on the third morning, and all that day, had a beautiful though distant view of the Caucasus, which was now covered with snow. I could recognise Kasbek, and, late in the afternoon, Elburz. About one hundred miles beyond Derbend we reached the steppes; but, instead of finding them deserted and unpopulated, we came constantly to flourishing Russian military settlements—large thriving towns, with a splendid race of men of the pure Cossack type. The conscription had lately taken place, and the recruits were now being marched away. How we should have liked such recruits for our army!

At every ten or twelve miles we came to a considerable town, generally with immense barracks on the hut principle. The roofs of all the houses were first thatched and then covered with mud plaster, which gives them a very trim appearance. The road crossed several considerable rivers, and on the evening of the fifth day we reached Stavropol. Just before our arrival it began to snow. Stavropol is a very large, clean-looking town, and we found a good hotel; but the attempt to get post-horses and push on was strenuously resisted.

They said that a steppe snow-storm had just set in, and that to attempt to go on at night would be certain death; that it constantly happened that travellers (especially those in carriages with wheels) who were caught in these storms were completely snowed up,

frozen to death, and not discovered for weeks; that it would be impossible to keep the road at night; in fact, that if we wanted to go we must go by ourselves, as we should get neither post-horses nor driver. We thought at the time that they were anxious to detain us at the hotel, and that all this was an exaggeration. However, there was no help for it, and we had to sleep there. In the morning I met an Austrian officer who was travelling, and who knew this country well. He fully endorsed all that we had heard, and begged us to wait at Stavropol until the storm had subsided; but as this delay might be indefinite, and as we found that the driver from the post-house was willing to try it, we started about nine o'clock.

It was not until we got right out into the steppes that I fully realised the awful nature of the storm. The wind howled and blew a perfect hurricane, and the drifting snow was so thick that we could not see twenty yards in advance of the horses. Fortunately, the line of telegraph-posts which followed the track served as a guide. The cold was so intense that, notwithstanding all our wraps and skins, we were half-frozen. It was impossible to expose the face to the storm, and we wrapped our heads completely in thick rugs; yet, even then, our breath froze and made the inside of the rug a mass of ice. How the driver managed, I do not know; but he only just exposed his eyes. Happily the snow had not lasted long, so that it was not deep except in the drifts; but I could now thoroughly recognise the danger that we should run if this weather continued. Towards the afternoon the sky cleared, and it was fine but intensely cold. We halted for about an hour at a large military settlement, the main street of which was over three miles in length. Altogether, I was sur-

prised to find these barren steppes well—I might almost say thickly—populated by a fine and hardy race.

What a fearful power Russia will become in the future! Already a railway runs right through these steppes, and there is direct communication with Moscow and St. Petersburg up to Vladikavkaz. A railway is being made from there to Tiflis, and on to Erivan, and another from Tiflis to Baku.

It is a common argument with the "Masterly Inactivity" school of Indian politicians, that there can be no danger from Russia in the East until her railway system is more advanced, and that this must take twenty years; when those who follow us must, I suppose, shift for themselves. But do those who hold these views ever study the present railway system of Russia, and reflect that the whole of that system has been worked out in the last twenty years? And yet it is seriously urged that it will take Russia twenty years to make a railway from Orenburg to Samarcand! Truly these politicians hold convenient theories. It is so easy to do nothing, so easy to shift our own responsibilities on to the shoulders of succeeding generations! What matter if they find that years of neglect and want of foresight have heaped up insurmountable difficulties, that ought to have been avoided by common care and prudence? The present will last our day, and give no trouble. Let the future take care of itself.

The night after leaving Stavropol was more intensely cold than it is possible to conceive. It was not snowing, but a gale was blowing which nothing seemed to have power to keep out. I got seriously anxious about Gerome, who was on the box with the driver, and who, although well provided with warm things, felt it sadly. The next day the snowstorm recommenced with in-

creased fury. Towards the afternoon the scene became terrible, and recalled all the warnings we had received at Stávropol, for now the snow grew deep upon the track. We had five horses to the little carriage, yet they strained and toiled fearfully; the drifts grew deeper and deeper every moment; and, if we stopped for a minute, the snow accumulated round the carriage to a most alarming extent. The hurricane roared over the steppe, and it was impossible to see twenty yards in any direction. The horses, utterly tired, could only drag the carriage about 200 yards at a time without stopping for a moment to take breath. The snow grew deeper and their strength less. Fortunately the telegraph-posts still served as a guide, and we knew at least that we were on the right road. The efforts of the poor horses became shorter and shorter, and we now struggled on only for a few yards at a time, until at last, plunging into a deeper drift than ever, we came to a stand-still. All seemed hopeless, for in an hour's time we should be completely buried and frozen to death. But our driver descended from his box, and went plunging forward through the snow on foot. Soon after he disappeared we heard a joyful shout; and he hurried back and urged the horses forward again with a violent application of the whip. The plucky beasts, responding to the call, made a last effort and dragged us on for another twenty yards; when, looking through the snow, to our left we discerned a small house. It was the first house of the village in which lay the next post-station, and we were saved!

The snow in the village streets was not nearly so thick. The horses, seeming to know that their stable was at hand, tugged us forward, and in another quarter of an hour we were in a warm and comparatively com-

fortable room, congratulating ourselves upon our escape, and listening to the wild storm which raged outside but could not penetrate through the double windows of our welcome refuge. But how to get on was the question. It was evidently hopeless to attempt to proceed farther in the carriage even when the storm subsided; so we came to terms with the keeper of the post-station, who in exchange for a present of our carriage agreed to lend us two sledges to take us on to Rostov.

By the next morning the snow had ceased, and we started in our sledges; G—— and I in front, and Gerome with our small stock of baggage in the second. We were obliged to take a Cossack to show us the road, as we left the telegraph-posts for this stage. Only a few Cossacks, we were told, who seemed to have an intuitive power of finding the way, could act as guides over the snowy waste we should have to traverse.

The light gliding movement of the sledge was delightful after travelling over the snow on wheels. Occasionally a horse would sink into a gulley, and only leave his head visible; but everything was soon rectified, and we got on at a fair pace. By mid-day we saw the first sign of the new railway, which did not before take the line of the post-road. In a few hours more some higher ground appeared in front, with a large town extending for a considerable distance; and then in a few minutes we pulled up on the banks of the frozen Don. And there on the other side, puffing and blowing, came an engine and train; and a wild thrill of delight passed through our hearts. No more weary riding over barren wastes; no more struggling by slow post-stages over endless steppes! The iron horse was before us. Those two rails of iron ran in one uninterrupted track to Calais, and we already felt at home. But our troubles were

not quite at an end. A thaw had set in, and it was doubtful whether the river would bear the sledges. At the sides the ice was quite thin. An officer and a party of soldiers, however, appeared, who placed boards from the bank, and so we got on to the thicker ice. A country sledge followed ours. As we progressed the ice cracked ominously. We were about three parts of the way across when there was a sudden crash behind us; and on looking quickly back I saw that the ice had broken, and that the country sledge, horses and all, were struggling in the water. Fortunately it was not very close to Gerome's sledge, and in a few minutes more we were safely on the Rostov side of the Don; still we had about seven miles to drive. I was quite surprised to see how thickly peopled this district seemed to be. For the whole seven miles it was an almost continuous town; large, clean, well-to-do looking houses, and a thriving aspect about everything. There were several good hotels, and we soon found ourselves surrounded by an air of civilization which we had not been accustomed to for months, and sitting down to a *table d'hôte*.

Our train from Moscow leaving early the next morning, we were off before daybreak, speeding towards the north. We followed the banks of the Don for some distance, constantly passing large thriving towns; then we struck due north and gradually wound our way over a steppe-like country, which evidently was only thinly populated. The scenery was dreary and monotonous, and the railways of Southern Russia are painfully slow. People appear to take railway journeys for the purpose of eating and drinking, for at almost every other station there was a stoppage with this object; and about every eighty miles we stayed for an hour to make a

heavy meal. And admirably these refreshment rooms are arranged. On entering, a cook, in most correct cap and dress, stands before a row of spirit-lamps, and over each spirit-lamp rests a copper containing some savoury dish. A small bill of fare proclaims the contents. The waiting, however, is very moderate; and it is wisest to wait upon oneself.

Why should France and Russia have the monopoly in all Europe of decent refreshment rooms? For both Germany and Italy lag far behind them, while England is last of all in the race. Many old abuses have been swept away by the force of public opinion; but the British refreshment room is impregnable, scorning alike the wants of the age and the power of the Press. When shall we find a really bold Chancellor of the Exchequer, who will lay a heavy impost upon stale buns, pork pies, and sausage-rolls, and thus bring their fortress crumbling to the ground or pay off the National Debt?

We were disgusted with the nonsense shown with regard to wines. The wines of the Don and Crimea are excellent, and were procurable at Rostov at ridiculously low prices. Yet at the first refreshment station we found nothing but what pretended to be French or Spanish wines, at very high prices. On asking for the wine of the country, we were told that they did not keep such a thing as Russian wine, that everything was French; and the wine-list was a curiosity, Lafitte and Médoc being of the same price; and probably with great justice. "Give us some Russian beer, then," we said, to the great disgust of the waiter; and that we found to be excellent.

Nothing could exceed the monotony of the landscape; but the carriages were very comfortable and well provided with stoves and double windows, so that we were some-

times unpleasantly warm. Our fellow-travellers were enveloped in those enormous fur coats which are peculiar to Russia. Some of the furs are magnificent; and, as there is no possibility of imitation, the Russian higher or richer classes can be detected at a glance in winter. We travelled on day and night for fifty-two hours, and at an average rate of only fourteen miles an hour, including stoppages, until we reached Moscow. In some places long screens had been erected by the side of the railway to protect the line from snow-drifts; but we experienced no difficulty, although how the line is kept clear in violent snow-storms I do not understand.

We had been recommended to go to the Stravansky Bazaar Hotel at Moscow, but, on our arrival at the station, the hotel touts who assaulted us either professed to know nothing about it or declared it was closed. However, taking a carriage, we discovered that this was only an attempt to mislead. The new and spacious hotel was remarkably well managed, and had all the comforts of the best hotels of London and Paris.

Of course we rushed off to the Kremlin, ascending the bell tower, from which we had a magnificent view of this most grand and splendid city. Moscow is unlike any other town in the world. The architecture is not Eastern, and it is not ancient, but it stands *per se*; and I know no place so well worth a visit. But I have no intention of describing Russia or Russia's towns. Christmas was drawing very near, and our sole object, after our long and trying journey, was to speed away to those chalk cliffs that held all that was near and dear to us. The same night, therefore, we were again on the line to St. Petersburg; where the express trains approach more nearly to usual European rates of speed. The country is painfully uninteresting, consisting as it

does of never-ending pine-woods, and deep sluggish rivers with villages on their banks, succeeded by more pine-woods. We reached St. Petersburg in the morning.

I had often read accounts of St. Petersburg, but was surprised to see so beautiful and striking a city. In spite of the desperate cold, we dashed about in sledges, and made the usual purchases of malachite and furs. We called upon Lord A. Loftus, whom I had known at Berlin; but he was away in London. Mr. Mitchell, of the Embassy, hearing that we had called, kindly asked us to his house, and we there met both Mr. Schuyler and Mr. Dilke, the former having just arrived from Bokhara and the latter from Samarcand. So we formed quite a Central-Asian party, and passed a very interesting evening in comparing notes. The next morning we were off again, and the following night we were at Konigsberg on the Prussian frontier. We did not halt again for more than about an hour. Berlin flashed by on one day; Brussels on the next; and in the afternoon we were crossing from Ostend. That same evening we ran into the Charing Cross Station; where, with a hearty shake of the hand to my staunch companion, who had stuck to me so manfully "in sickness and in health," our Central-Asian Expedition terminated.

A

POLITICAL AND STRATEGICAL REPORT

ON

CENTRAL ASIA.

THE strategical policy of England in Central Asia opens out a wide field for reflection. It is evident that the interests of this country in Asia are bound up with the possession of our Indian Empire; and it is equally evident that the maintenance of that Empire can only be permanently and seriously imperilled by one European Power. Political and strategical considerations are so intermingled, that it will be impossible to separate them when dealing with the relative positions of England and Russia in the East. But if it be assumed that it is mainly as they directly or indirectly affect our position in India that Russian advances become important, it will help to narrow the vast field of political, military, and geographical inquiry which has to be traversed in the careful consideration of this question.

India—that grand and valuable dependency of this country,—contains a native and conquered population of nearly two hundred millions.* It embraces many different races and many different religions, and it unites under British rule tribes and countries that have for centuries been in constant antagonism to each other. Within the range of mountains which guards the northern frontier and marks the boundary of Hindostan, many minor and some important independent States

* The population of British India is 193,000,000; that of the independent Native States 48,000,000. The revenue derived from British India is about 50,000,000*l.*; that claimed by the rulers of independent Native States about 15,000,000*l.*

still exist. The nature and the religion alike of most of these tribes and countries are adverse to progress and civilization. Their very traditions are records of intrigue, of war, and of disorder. They possess the excitability and impatience of steady political control which is so characteristic of Eastern races.

This great Empire is now held by less than 60,000 British troops. A careful and paternal Government is endeavouring to attract the people to our rule by a more equitable system of administration, by the construction of railways and public works, which will benefit the country generally, and by the maintenance of that order and tranquillity which must be the basis of all material prosperity. But, with our most sanguine hopes for the future, many years must elapse before the mass of our conquered Indian subjects will so thoroughly appreciate the advantages of our system as not to wish for change. It must be many years before we can hope to rule by the general will of the people themselves, without the force to coerce that will in case of necessity. Moreover, there is a tendency in Asiatics to worship power, and to believe in material force. At present England, in their minds, embodies the idea of a great and subjugating power, and they obey instinctively.

Prestige has over their minds an extraordinary influence. Whilst this state of things continues, India will offer an easy field for the intrigues of any neighbouring nation. The ease with which we have governed that country in the past has resulted from its practical isolation from European politics, and the absence of any rival Asiatic State. Upon this isolation the safety of our Empire depends. No one who is acquainted with Asiatic character can doubt that the near approach of any rival would so unsettle the minds of our Indian subjects as to prove an utter hindrance to that process of willing absorption which is the present great object of our Government. It must be remembered that England in the past has had an advantage over all the other European Powers. Her own home frontier, protected by the sea and guarded by a superior fleet, has isolated her from the danger of invasion which has constantly menaced the Continental States and compelled them to keep up gigantic military armaments. Beyond our Indian boundary the same immunity has existed. The immense distance which

separated our frontier from that of Russia, the difficulty of communication, and the weakness and instability of the countries which intervened, have hitherto also isolated India from danger of attack. But it cannot be too carefully remembered that if ever Russian territory touches or too closely approaches ours in the East, provided, as will certainly be the case, that her railway communication is established, this immunity will have passed away, and that we shall then come under the same category as the continental powers of Europe, and either have to vie in number with their armies, or hold our Indian Empire upon sufferance.

Thus the part which England must play in the future of the great Central Asian question becomes a question of policy. The dangers which loom in that future are still so far distant that firmness and consistency may for ever avert them, while a weak or vacillating line of action must inevitably lead to the gravest difficulties, and, probably, to the gravest disasters in time to come. But this is a question which must be settled, for it will no longer bear postponement. And, in considering our general policy in the East, it must be remembered that, although we may naturally wish to avoid responsibilities relative to certain frontier countries, we have not the power to do so without throwing those countries under the direct influence of Russia, who would immediately accept the responsibilities from which we might be inclined to shrink.

We have also to consider that, with Eastern races, an active policy has greater charms and produces a greater impression than passive inaction. Throughout the whole East this cause has already produced its effect. In the wildest parts of Central Asia, in the farthest deserts of Turkomania, there is a strong and a growing belief that the power of England is on the wane, and that the ever-conquering Russians are destined before long to drive us from Hindostan. To side with the stronger power is the natural characteristic of Eastern races. To intrigue in the interests of that power is the natural consequence of such a belief. And should our prestige in the East decline, so will the difficulties of holding India proportionately increase.

What, then, is our position in the East? And what has led up to the present situation?

Nature has given the whole of Southern Hindostan a sea boundary, while a high range of mountains guards all the

northern frontier which is approachable by land. This range to the north and north-east is so high and of such extent, as to be impregnable if seriously defended; and it is only on the north-west that several practicable passes exist by which the security of India might be imperilled. Thus Hindostan might be likened to a gigantic fortress; but it has this disadvantage, that the glacis is not in possession of the garrison, and that the passes themselves are held, in some instances, by doubtful allies. Past military history has proved in all ages that the passage of a mountain chain is neither a difficult nor a formidable operation if the passes are in possession of the attackers; and that India forms no exception to this rule, and is not impregnable from the north-west, is proved by the fact that only 136 years ago Nadir Shah, at the head of a Persian force of only 80,000 men, forced these passes, and, advancing into the heart of India, conquered Delhi.

Even before British territory had been carried up to the foot of the chain of mountains which bounds north-western Hindostan, Indian statesmen had seen this difficulty looming in the future, and had sought to counteract it. The dissensions of the Afghans, caused by disputes relative to succession, favoured their projects. In that country succession to the sovereignty lies in selection by the sovereign amongst his sons. This system, dangerous under any form of religion, is doubly objectionable under the Mahomedan faith, and ever has led, and ever must lead, to interminable family feuds and popular revolutions. The situation gave a plausible opening for the action of our Indian diplomatists. They found Russia steadily and rapidly advancing southwards, conquering tribe after tribe of the wild Kirghiz, and using up the warlike energy of these recent acquisitions by employing them under Russian officers in further and still further conquests. Then Khiva, Bokhara, Khokand seemed the only feeble barriers that could stem, for a time, this steady onward progress towards the banks of the Oxus; and the Oxus once gained, gave water communication right up to the frontier of Afghanistan.

Herat had ever, and justly, been considered throughout the East as the key to India. From near Herat far into the deserts of Turkomania runs the river Moorghab, forming, eventually, the great oasis of Merv, only 140 miles from the

banks of the Oxus. Thus, as Herat was the key to India, so was Merv the key to Herat. For Merv, with this water communication nearly complete, lies only 240 miles from Herat, while Herat is 540 miles from the frontier mountain-passes of Hindostan.* Moreover, the tenure of Herat was never long secure. Now conquered temporarily by Persia, now held by some disappointed and rebel son or brother of the ruler of Afghanistan, it was a constant focus of intrigue. It was well known that the design of handing it over to Russia had been seriously contemplated, and that the great Northern Power had entered into secret negotiations with this object. Once at Merv, she could evidently reach Herat long before an expedition starting from India could arrive there. Once at Herat, and every Indian in Hindostan would believe that the rule of England in the East had set, and would act accordingly. So imminent had this danger apparently become that in 1838, notwithstanding that Runjeet Singh, who had consolidated the Sikh power and maintained a large army under European officers, lay between us and the Khyber Pass leading to Caubul, notwithstanding that the warlike and faithless Ameers of Scinde interposed between us and the southern pass of the Bolan leading to Candahar and Herat, it was determined to occupy Afghanistan, and to place on the throne a sovereign who would yield steady obedience to British commands.

At that time Dost Mahomed, one of the cleverest and most warlike rulers that Afghanistan had ever produced, a man of real genius, and possessing great influence over the Afghans, opposed our advance. Yet, although less than 6000 British troops and 11,000 natives were employed in this expedition, the occupation of the country was accomplished with ridiculous ease, and in a few short months British regiments had occupied Candahar and Caubul, and a British Resident guided the councils of the ruler of Herat.† Utterly disheartened, Dost Mahomed surrendered at discretion, and became a State prisoner. Afghanistan was at our feet. But a prolonged and feeble occupation was determined upon, and then there followed

* 540 miles from Quettah; but 740 from Jacobabad, on our Indian frontier.

† The Afghan force, consisting principally of cavalry, would be comparatively useless against the present long-range breech-loading rifles.

a series of political mistakes, and a degree of military imbecility unparalleled in the history of any country, culminating in a fearful disaster, and the destruction of the little force with its mass of camp followers which had been left at Caubul. A small avenging army easily reconquered the lost positions, and then the country was abandoned. This disaster marks a great era in Indian policy which cannot be too attentively studied. The incompetency which had led to it, the smallness of the force which had accomplished the occupation, the utter inability of the Afghans to withstand organized European troops, were all forgotten in the profound impression which the disaster itself had created.

A false and exaggerated idea of the power of Afghanistan to repel an invasion remained, and was handed down to future Indian politicians. It was held that, if we had so suffered, Russia if she pushed into Afghanistan would suffer also, and that thus Afghanistan would form a safe bulwark to our Indian Empire. Even the geography of the country was ignored, and the fact that Russia might advance to Herat and Candahar without ever involving herself in mountain passes, as we had done at Caubul, was lost sight of. And the geography of Afghanistan is peculiar. Herat, Candahar and Caubul, the three most important strategical points, lie at the angles of a triangle; Herat on the west, Candahar on the south, Caubul on the east. Yet there is no road for an army between Herat and Caubul without going far to the north, through intricate mountain passes, or through the plains south to Candahar, and thence by Ghasnee to Caubul. Thus Candahar becomes a most important strategical point, for its possession closes the road between Eastern and Western Afghanistan. Quettah, at the mouth of the Bolan, which virtually commands Candahar, which had not belonged to Afghanistan, and which was in our possession, which had been before the occupation reported on as an important point, valuable from its climate, its position, and its strategical importance, was yielded up in the new and unreasoning reaction, and a steady policy of passive inaction commenced.

But events are stronger than policy.

Runjeet Singh, the lion of the Punjab, had died, and the disorders which ensued compelled an onward movement, which only ended at the foot of the Himalayan chain and the mouth

of the Khyber; while, in Scinde, Napier, crushing the troublesome Ameers at Meeanee with a mere handful of troops, brought our rule and influence up to the foot of the Bolan.

Dost Mahomed reigned again in Afghanistan, and by his decision and energy brought back the frontier of that country to its old limits. And when in 1854 war actually broke out with Russia, none of those Eastern problems which had for so many years been watched by Russian and Indian statesmen were solved. With France, England, Sardinia, and Turkey all bearing upon her in the west, with Austria neutralizing a large army on her frontier, and the Circassians and Lesghians in insurrection in the Caucasus, Russia had not a man to spare for the Eastern counter-move; but that counter-move was planned, and we know in what it consisted. Moreover, intrigues were set on foot amongst the independent states in Hindostan; intrigues which, acting upon congenial soil, had probably no slight connection with the great Indian Mutiny which broke out three years later, and which, although we were at peace with every European power, shook our Empire in the East to its foundations, and tried the Imperial military resources to the utmost.

Beyond the western frontier of Afghanistan, and next in importance amongst the native states, lies Persia.

Persia, the only one of the great empires of ancient times which has survived, has little in her condition which is hopeful for the future. A grossly corrupt system of government, a bankrupt treasury, no fleet, and an army which for any practical purpose is useless, form no glowing picture of national prosperity.* Constantly in dread of invasion either by the

* The Persian army is composed of 76 battalions of infantry, 60,000 irregular cavalry (nominally), and 120 guns; but this force is imaginary. Though the battalions exist, most of them are the merest cadres. The regiments near Teheran are kept up at a strength of from 800 to 900 men, and are in comparatively good order; but those far distant dwindle away to nothing. Persia could probably place about 35,000 infantry in the field. The irregular cavalry could not muster more than 25,000; and they are without discipline, organization, or cohesion, and would be more dangerous to their friends than to their enemies. But both in the cavalry and infantry there is good material. The guns nominally number 120, but they are of all sorts of calibres, and not more than 60 could be put in the field. Each district has to supply a certain number of men to the

Russians, Turks or Afghans, her roads and lines of communication have purposely been left undeveloped. The natural result has ensued. Her commerce has dwindled; famine and misgovernment have done their work; and everything tends towards ruin and decay. But Persia, thus fallen through misgovernment and corruption to almost the lowest point which a once great nation can reach without dissolution, occupies a very important position in connection with India and the Central Asian question, both politically and strategically. A short review of the geography of that country is necessary, in order to understand this position exactly.

Persia may be described as a vast desert, except where water is found, when her soil is a marvel of fertility. The great chain of mountains which runs south of the Black Sea in Asia Minor, and which then forms the southern boundary of Russia in the Caucasus, marks the old northern frontier of Persia, and eventually joins the Hindoo Koosh in Afghanistan. At the base of these mountains on the shores of the Caspian lie the rich provinces of Ghilan and Mazanderan utterly neglected, but perhaps the most fertile belt of country in the world. The northern mountain slopes are fringed with valuable forests of teak, oak, walnut, and box, while coal and iron are found on the southern plateau.

But this is the only part of Persia thus enriched by Nature. The rest is desert, except where streams run through the country, when artificial irrigation often brings large tracts under cultivation. This is especially the case near Kermanshah and Hamadan on the Turkish frontier. But the whole Eastern centre of Persia is a vast salt plain, uncultivated and uninhabited, and which, from its want of water, can only be passed by small caravans of camels on a few roads where brackish wells exist, and even then with great difficulty. This desert reaches almost from the south of the great mountain chain already mentioned near Damghan and Shahrood in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south; thus virtually, and for strategical purposes, separating Eastern from Western Persia by a narrow

army. No commissariat exists, and the troops when marching live upon the country. Since the Shah's return from Europe, efforts have been made to improve the Persian army, and breech-loaders are being introduced. The success of this attempt at improvement remains to be seen.

passage both on the north and south, the northern belt being fertile and well watered, the southern barren and difficult. Thus, any force holding Astrabad and Shahrood would practically isolate the whole of Eastern Persia, for the roads from west to east in Northern Persia are watered and easy, while those in Southern Persia are arid and difficult, and there are no roads between, as the desert intervenes.

When Russia in 1828 conquered and took from Persia the rich western shore of the southern Caspian, and forced that country to sign the Treaty of Turkmantchai, she turned the Caspian into a purely Russian lake. Not only was Persia prohibited from keeping vessels of war on the Caspian, but she actually was not permitted to trade from her own shores under her own flag. Consequently, the harbours of Enzelli and Ashourada, which would have been so important for this nation's northern maritime trade, were rendered useless, and Ashourada Island, which commands an important inland water, was afterwards handed over to Russia, but with the proviso that she should erect no fort and build no dockyard. *

But Ashourada harbour is of immense strategical importance, and so thoroughly was this recognized by Russia that, although lying far from her own shores, and having a deadly climate in the later summer months, she made it her principal naval station in the Caspian. The value of this strategical position will at once be seen by studying the map of the adjacent country, and considering the nature of that northern frontier of Persia which intervenes between the Caspian and Afghanistan, and by which lie the only direct roads which lead from the Caspian to Herat, the south being barred by the salt desert.

The great chain of mountains already mentioned runs between

* This has been adhered to, and all vessels have to be sent to Baku for repairs. Ashourada is one of some small sandy islands which lie to the north of a large inland water. The islands are only raised some eight or nine feet out of the sea, and in heavy gales the surf washes half over the island. The soundings of this inland water are given on the accompanying map. There is very little trade from Ashourada, and it can only be held by Russia from the great facility which it would give for the march of a large army eastward. The Persians have built two insignificant forts on the mainland, to the west, which are unimportant. No difficulty would exist in landing an army of any strength on the east side, and one march would take it to the Gourgan, where there is an abundant water-supply, and another march would bring it to the Attrek.

Astrabad and Shahrood; but about 100 miles to the east it breaks into irregular spurs, and a great triangular block, of equal general height to the main chain, is thrown out to the north, having its salient angle at Kizil Arvat, and again joining the main chain near Dereguez. From the western base of this vast triangular block of mountains into the Caspian, near Ashourada, runs the River Gourgan, while only twenty miles more to the north lies the Attrek.

The Gourgan is of no strategical importance except as affording an immediate water-supply to a force of any strength landing from the harbour of Ashourada. It is very different with the Attrek. Rising far to the east, near Koochan, in a small village called Itabile, sometimes dry and sometimes deep and sluggish, it runs as an uncertain little stream to Shirvan; where it is fed by a constant and extraordinary tepid spring called Karakazan. Passing north of Boojnoord, it winds through a broad, rich valley with but little sudden fall, and collecting the watershed of the greater portion of the block of mountains already mentioned, by numerous mountain streams it passes out of this block into the plain. Meeting the Simbur at this point, it runs with uncertain depth, sometimes passing through large marshes or overflows; and, unnavigable except by boats of very light draught, it eventually enters the Caspian through the Bay of Hassan Kouli, having only a depth of two feet at the bar.*

Thus, along the banks of the river an army might march to Koochan by a comparatively level and easy road. From Koochan to Meshed lies a broad, well-watered valley, teeming with supplies; and from Meshed to Herat the road has often been traversed by large armies. But this is not the only route from Ashourada to Herat. If the right bank of the Attrek were followed to the junction of the Simbur, an army might march along the plains at the foot of the mountains to Kizil Arvat, and thence by Burma, Nissa, Abiverd, and Kelat, to Sarakhs.

Numberless streams running from the mountains give a

* The Turkomans have sailing-boats of from four to six tons, which only draw two feet of water. These, towed by steam launches, will facilitate the supply of an army marching up the banks of the Attrek as far as the junction with the Simbur; but the river cannot be looked upon as navigable.

supply of good water all the way, and the road would be level and easy. All along this route from Kizil Arvat to Sarakhs, at distances of seven or eight miles, lie the old Persian forts built probably in the time of Khosro, which mark the true Persian frontier, but many of which are now occupied by the Turkomans. Massive earthworks standing out of the plains at the foot of the hills, they will remain for many centuries to come as decaying monuments of the past.* Near Sarakhs the Heri-rood joins the Keshef-rood and forms the River Tejend. The bank of the Heri-rood, which runs from Herat to this point, would then be followed. Thus this is another and easy road from Ashourada to Herat. By both these routes wheeled transport might be used.

From Perivale (Gez), a small landing-place on the southern side of Ashourada harbour, a road (40 miles) leads to Astrabad, and another (50 miles) from Astrabad to Shahrood. If Shahrood were seized and held, it would prevent any possibility of relieving Eastern Persia from the west, and it would completely cover the march of armies to the East by the two routes indicated, or by the more difficult but well-known road which leads by Muzenoon, Subsawar, and Nishapore to Meshed.

It is evident, then, that Ashourada Harbour is a most important strategical point. And it is the more important, because the eastern shore of the Caspian slopes so gradually that vessels cannot lie near the land on account of the shallow draught of water, and the sudden and dangerous gales which spring up in that sea.† There is no other harbour nearer than Krasnovodsk, and at Krasnovodsk there is a dearth of fresh

* They would form admirable depôts for the supply of an army marching by this route, and if mounted with guns would be almost impregnable, as they stand out of the plains and command all the surrounding country. They are entered by a sloping road, which usually leads through a large gateway. In those that are occupied, the mud houses are crammed together so close that they resemble a warren. They are quite unassailable by the Turkomans. Water is always found near them, and they are often surrounded by a large belt of fertile country, which was evidently once well cultivated.

† Near the mouth of the Attrek there is only a depth of nine feet of water at three miles from the shore, and the water shelves most gradually; hence the difficulty of landing men or supplies on this coast, and the importance of Ashourada harbour, where troops and supplies could be disembarked in any weather.

water. Although the draught of water in Ashourada harbour is only fourteen feet, all the vessels in the Caspian have been built to enter it, and they might all lie there perfectly land-locked at one time.

From Ashourada we have seen that the great range of mountains before indicated runs along the northern frontier of Persia and Afghanistan until it merges with the Hindoo Koosh. But the nature of this frontier remains to be considered. North of this range, extending right away to the Oxus, lie the great desert steppes of Turkomania. But it is a mistake to suppose that the Turkomans inhabit these steppes. These wild and warlike people are divided into three distinct tribes, viz., the Yamouts, the Goklans, and the Tekès; but, as it would be impossible to live in the desert, these nomads are gathered on the banks of the Oxus in the north, the banks of the Attrek and Gourgan in the south, and all along the northern and well-watered slopes of the great mountain range, or at Merv and the banks of the Moorghab, beyond Afghan territory. The Yamouts lie near Khiva, on the banks of the Oxus and on the shores of the Caspian. The Goklans inhabit the banks of the Simbur and Lower Attrek. The Tekès, far the most powerful and warlike tribe, inhabit the northern base of the mountains from Kizil Arvat to Tejend, and also Merv, and the banks of the Moorghab.

For centuries every man's hand has been against the Turkomans, and their hands against every man. Shut in by the much more numerous, but less warlike, Usbegs on the north, and by the Persians on the south, they could only hold their own by the sword, and through the marvellous breed of horses which their country produces; but, although a mere handful of men in comparison, they have driven the Persians from many parts of their proper frontier, and occupied the fertile northern slopes of the great mountain range. So little chance had the effeminate Persians against these brave and warlike hordes, that Shah Abbas more than 200 years ago transplanted Khoords from the Turkish frontier, and organized military colonies between Astrabad and the Afghan boundary forming the provinces of Astrabad, Boojnoord, Koochan, Dereguez, Kelat, and Sarakhs.

The Khoords are as fine a race as the Turkomans, and between

the two a constant and barbarous border warfare prevails; and although the Turkomans are accused, and justly, of barbarity, they do not approach the cold-blooded cruelty of the Persian provinces with which they are constantly at war. As long as Khiva and Bokhara were great slave-marts, the Turkomans made raids into Persian territory, in order to capture prisoners, whom they afterwards sold to the Usbegs. But in the North Persian provinces a price is set upon the heads of the Turkomans, and constant and bloody reprisals are made. Nor is it likely that this state or things will cease, except by interference from without, as it is to the interest of the Persian Governors to keep up this warfare.* In this war each Turkoman takes what he can gain by his own prowess; but in the return raids the Persian Governors take the lion's share of the booty, and their subjects alone suffer.

The Turkoman tribes form small republics, but republics without any head. They live in felt tents, which they move according to the season of the year, and obey, to a certain extent, the heads of their respective villages, who meet together for consultation in case of any great emergency. But this is not the case at present with the Tekès, who have rallied under one chief, Kourschid Khan, a man of great bravery and a fine and determined character, who resides at Merv. Thus the Tekès are perfectly distinct from the Yamouts and the Goklans, and are removed by some hundreds of miles from those Yamouts who are settled on the Oxus, near Khiva, and who were engaged against the Russians in the recent campaign.

During that campaign, frightened at Russia's near approach, the Tekès commenced fortifying Merv, and succeeded in obtaining thirty-four old field-pieces from Khiva and Afghanistan; but the works, commenced on a most extensive scale, were left uncompleted. Brave to a degree, usually armed with a lance, a sabre, and a double-barrelled gun, often of Birmingham manufacture, and mounted on that splendid and enduring race of Arabs, which, from the peculiarities of soil, now equal English thoroughbreds in size and resemble them in appearance, the Turkoman is the beau ideal of a wild irregular horseman. They have many fine

* Of course the Russian occupation of Khiva has lessened the inducement to make raids for slaves, and flocks and herds are now the principal booty on both sides.

and noble qualities, but from generation to generation they have found themselves preyed upon by their more numerous neighbours, and have only preserved their traditions of independence by their hardihood and courage. When settled on the Persian frontier under the Koordish Governors, they are soon found very tractable, and loyally resist the inroads of their compatriots.

At present, from want of organization, they would fall an easy prey to any European army; but should they ever come under European officers (a result which might easily be brought about) these 120,000 magnificent horsemen, guarding as they do that great sea of desert, which extending from the Caspian to Balkh now isolates Russia from Herat and India, would form a splendid frontier force. If they be conquered, however, and brought under Russian rule and leading, Afghanistan will ever lie at their mercy.

These brave wild tribes are destined to play a prominent part in that great question which time will unavoidably bring upon us in the East. At the present moment, scared by the recent Russian advances, and knowing that they must next fall a prey to the great onward wave, they are ready to rally upon any friendly power, and their nomadic habits would render their concentration or migration easy. They have already made overtures to Persia; but Persia, feeble and inert, fears them, and there is a traditional hatred between the two. They would readily rally on Afghanistan, but the differences and jealousies between the late ruler of Herat and his father, Shere Ali, have hitherto prevented any satisfactory arrangement, although Kourschid Khan sent his eldest son last year on a mission to Shere Ali with this object.

It is singular that, with the dearth of horses which now exists in India, the magnificent breed which is to be found in such boundless numbers amongst the Turkomans has never made its way on any large scale into Hindostan.

The advances of Russia in Central Asia have been so constant and so rapid during the last half century, that they can best be traced by the accompanying map.

About the time when England was meeting with disasters in Afghanistan, Russia sent an expedition against Khiva, which perished in the deserts. But this mishap seemed but to whet her appetite for conquest. Pushing steadily forwards, she soon had forts along the line of the Sir Darya; then, finding that near the Sea of Aral her farther progress was barred by the great desert of Kizil Kum, she turned that desert towards the east, and, occupying Tashkend, soon reduced both Khokand and Bokhara to submission, and established herself at Samarcand. Once having passed the great frontier line of the Sir Darya, it was little likely that she would halt short of the Oxus. Let her, however, pass that true boundary line backed by its sea of desert, and where will she halt again short of the Indian Ocean? It is of little use to trace the events of those past forty years which have pushed her frontier so far to the south. It is more important carefully to study her present position and her future prospects.

The conquest of Khiva, the construction of forts on the Oxus, and the treaty with Bokhara giving the right of establishing trading posts along the line of the Oxus, virtually make that great river the present boundary of Russia in the East.* And, although she is not established upon its whole course, we already see her contemplating further conquests south of this line. For as Russia extends her conquests in Khokand and probably in Bokhara, she will require more and more troops, and it will probably happen that before her railway system is completed we shall find a large Russian army in position to act from the line of the Oxus. Upon this next move will the whole fate of Central Asia virtually depend. For, as has already been shown, south of the Oxus lie the so-called Turkoman, but really uninhabited, deserts extending from the Caspian to Balkh. Thus she cannot cross the desert without either occupying a part of the old and true frontier of Persia, or threatening Herat, if she advances to Merv. Yet, on the other hand, lies the difficulty that Persia has

* Russia has a resident at Bokhara, and both Bokhara and Khokand are virtually Russian. I was laughed at when I asserted the contrary to the Koords and Turkomans. They said, "The Russians may not actually occupy both countries, but the Khans are obliged to do whatever Russia tells them." Since this was written, Khokand has been annexed.

allowed the Turkomans to occupy that part of her northern territory extending from the Gourgan along the mountains as far as Dereguez, and has not the energy to bring them under control.

That Russia should wish for a settled frontier is perfectly reasonable. Until she has a defined boundary to the south, she must continue to advance. We proved in India how constant our own extension of territory became, in defiance of minutes from England and the declared wish of successive Governments; and the causes which operate in Russia are stronger still. For there are many fiery spirits on her frontier, who have been banished, from political or other causes, to the wild and desert lands of Tartary. To these men, accustomed to the life of capitals, a passive existence in the desert steppes is fearfully irksome. Distinction in warlike operations gives their great and only hope of return. They live for war; and whatever may be the feelings and policy at St. Petersburg, their ambition is boundless. To them India lies, though still far away, as a sort of Land of Promise. Their camps will be found to be full of books giving the most glowing descriptions of its riches, its beauty, and its grandeur; all such a contrast to the dreary sands with sparse verdure and little water, and the poor and simple nomads amongst whom their lot is cast.

To these men, with nothing else to think of, the whole geography of Central Asia is familiar. To them the political relations of different states, the important strategical points, the desirable lines of communication are household words. How little are they known in Europe, and how powerless to control is the Cabinet of St. Petersburg! Some Yamout Turkomans attack a Russian post; how easy to report that they were Tekès, and to direct a new expedition against the latter if an important strategical position is to be gained! Who thinks or cares in Europe that the two are hundreds of miles apart? They are all Turkomans! But this is not the only cause that tends to lessen the power of the St. Petersburg Cabinet to control its increase of territory in the East. There has been for many years, in Russia, a department specially charged with the knowledge and administration of Eastern affairs. That department is thoroughly conversant with the geography and political relations of all those states which bear directly or

indirectly on the Central Asian question, and it is a department which is consistent both in its policy and in its action.

In England successive Governments may hold different views, or, even if *en accorde*, it is not always that the opinions of the Foreign and of the India Office may be identical. But in Russia a traditional policy has been upheld, and that policy dates back to Peter the Great; and we know that he aimed at curbing English power in the East by eventually absorbing Persia and establishing Russian authority at Herat and upon the Persian Gulf, thus getting that outlet to the sea which Nature seems to have denied, and at the same time threatening India on its weakest flank. And where can Russia find a settled frontier in Central Asia until she comes in contact with countries under British rule or influence? Persia, as has been shown, has allowed the Turkomans to settle within that boundary of forts which marks her northern frontier east of the Caspian; and a Russian column only two years ago actually advanced to those forts at Kizil Arvat and Burma, and burnt the former. If this is not the boundary of Persia, how is it to be defined? Yet in a State Paper, within the last few years, we have assumed that boundary to be "well-known." Certainly the Persians do not know it topographically; and the accompanying map, as will be seen by comparing it with others, is the first and only one that shows that country with any degree of accuracy from actual personal surveys.

Here, in England, the mouth of the Attrek is assumed to be the boundary of Russia on the Caspian, and it is understood that the Persians have agreed to admit Russian rights as far inland as the junction of the Attrek with the Simbur, *i.e.*, a part of the old Persian line. But on the spot the Russians have assumed a right to the Gourgan, and a Persian force cannot now cross the Gourgan. This at once violates the ancient line. Some Russian maps even claim the whole line of the Attrek, and falsely make that river rise near Abiverd instead of near Koochan, thus absorbing parts of several Persian provinces. Moreover, we know that Russia is now planning expeditions against the Tekès, who were not in contact with her at Khiva, and who occupy a part of the old Persian frontier, and that fertile and well-watered part which forms the main road for the march of an army from the Caspian to Herat. Thus Dereguez,

the important fortress of Kelat, and Sarakhs, all lie north of the mountain chain, and are distinctly Persian provinces held by Khoord Governors. How then can the Persian frontier be defined, if once the ancient and well-marked boundary is allowed to pass into Russian hands? For it must be remembered that the Turkomans merely hold parts of this line from the inertness of the Persian Government, and that their hold is constantly fluctuating. An energetic Governor will drive them back and reoccupy the real frontier: a careless successor will allow it again to lapse.

For example, a part of Dereguez which lies in a position especially open to Turkoman attacks was not many years ago in their hands; but its present energetic Koord Governor, Alayar Khan, has not only recovered the old boundary, but many Turkoman villages now remain as part of the province. It is evident that unless some clear definition of Persian frontier is agreed upon, and the term "well known" abandoned, serious difficulties must arise in the future. Moreover, according to the wording of the State paper alluded to, the Afghan frontier is more or less dependent on the true definition of the Persian. A line drawn from Kojah Saleh to the north of Deregez, which is admittedly Persian, places Merv south of that line, or in Afghan territory. The Russian proposal, which spoke of a line through the deserts, would have assured to both Afghanistan and Persia safe and true boundaries. That desert is the sea which separates Southern Central from Northern Central Asia; and, if Russia once crosses it, where can she halt again in her search for a boundary line?

Having thus briefly sketched the political and geographical positions of those countries which most nearly and immediately affect the Central Asian difficulty, a most important question still remains for review, viz., the influence which future railways will have, both strategically and politically, upon the country now under consideration. And this, again, becomes a great question of policy. For here a passive line of action is sure to succumb to the active. We may consider that it would be advantageous for us not to increase the facility of land commu-

nication between Europe and India. But, if Russia takes the contrary view, not only will railways in course of time connect the east and the west, but all those railways will be constructed in Russian interests, and for Russia's strategical advantage.

And it is well at once to discard the idea that railways would be unpopular in the wild countries which intervene. The advantage of railways is now well known amongst the wildest tribes of the East. They hear exaggerated reports of the riches and facilities of trade which follow in their train, and lament the want of money and resources which prevent their introduction. With this state of feeling existing, and with Russia anxious to push her lines of communication towards the East, the construction of railways is only a matter of time. Assuming this to be the case, there arises a great strategical question which has apparently hitherto been much omitted in the consideration of future eventualities beyond our own borders, and yet upon which the whole future must hinge, viz.—gauge. That it is so will be immediately evident. For railways would completely obviate those difficulties of transport, supply, and want of water, upon which the security of India from attack now depends. But, for the concentration and supply of large bodies of men, a plentiful rolling stock is absolutely requisite, and a break of gauge at once neutralizes this supply. Russia, and Russia only, has foreseen this difficulty. On her western frontier she has considered the difference which railways would make in any future invasion from the German or Austrian side, aided by all the rolling stock of either of those two countries, and she has broken her gauge at her proper frontier. Thus by withdrawing her rolling stock, she renders her railways practically useless to an invader. And in the great strategical systems of railways which she has inaugurated since the Crimean war, this object has never been lost sight of. Uniformity of gauge within her own territory, and a different gauge from other countries that border on her, has been carefully maintained.*

* The following is a list showing the gauges of all the Russian lines:—

I. 6-feet gauge. Tsarskoe—Selo.

II. 5-feet gauge. Nicolas. St. Petersburg—Warsaw. Moscow—Nijni-Novgorod. Baltic Port. Riga — Dünaburg. Don — Volga. Moscow—Riazau. Moscow—Jaroslaol. Voronetz—Rostov. Odessa. Dünaburg—Vitebsk. Riazau—Kozlov. Warsaw—Terespol—Brest. Schonia—Ivanovo. Orel—Vitebsk. Moscow—Koursk. Riajck—Morchanck. Orel—Griazi. Koursk—Kiev.

The question of railway communication with Southern and Central Asia was brought prominently forward even before the Crimean War. At that time the Suez Canal was not constructed, and was supposed to be an impossible undertaking. All the main Indian trade passed round the Cape, while passengers and light goods were transported viâ the Mediterranean to Alexandria, and by canal and river boats to Cairo, next by carriage across the desert to Suez, and forwarded thence by steamers.

Russia had no railway communication. Some attention had been paid to military roads, but movements of large bodies of troops to distant parts of her vast empire could only be made by long, toilsome, and destructive marches. The Crimean war developed this weakness to the utmost. It was found that not one-third of the troops forwarded from the north-west ever reached the Crimea; while, in one instance, a whole brigade disappeared on the march, destroyed by fatigue and sickness. Engaged for years in a desultory war with the Circassians in the Caucasus, it was only through the command of the Caspian Sea and communication by the Volga that Russia could hold her own upon the Turkish frontier of Asia Minor. Yet such were the difficulties of transport that, towards the end of the siege of Kars, the Russians in the Caucasus and on the Turkish frontier were in a most perilous position, although Russia had at that time 150,000 men in the Caucasus.

But no sooner was the war over than she turned her whole

Riga — Urittau. Koursk — Kharkov. Kharkov — Nicolaievsk. Griazi—Tsaritsyne. Tambov—Kozlov. Norotorgok. Rybinsk — Bologoe. Tambor — Saratov. Kiev — Brest — Berditchov. Moscow — Brest. Riajsk — Viazma. Potí — Tiflis. Libau — Constantinov. Riga — Bolderaa. Laudvarovo—Romny. Brest — Graiero. Lozovo—Sevastopol.

III. 4-feet 8½-inch gauge. Warsaw—Vienna. Warsaw—Bromberg. Iodzi.

IV. 3-feet 6-inch gauge. Livny (State line). Novgorod. Jaroslav—Vologda.

It will be seen that the Polish lines are 4 feet 8½ inches, or the gauge of all the other European lines, and the same as our own narrow gauge. On all her main lines, except the short Tsarskoe Selo, and the Livny, Novgorod and Jaroslav Vologda, a 5-feet gauge has been adopted. This looks as if the Siberian lines were to be constructed on the 3-feet 6-inch gauge, whilst all the southern and south-eastern lines are on the general 5-feet gauge. The Indian railways are all on the 5-feet 6-inch gauge.

attention to remedying this vital defect. Railways were projected, not, as usual, for commercial purposes, but based purely on strategical considerations; and, the money being raised by Government guarantees, they were executed with marvellous rapidity, and over an immense extent of country.* From that time to the present, and with unflagging determination, Russia has pushed forwards her strategical system of railways, and developed the steam communication of her rivers and inland seas. Continuous railway communication now exists between St. Petersburg and Vladikavkas in the Caucasus. A railway is being constructed between Vladikavkas and Tiflis, which is to be continued to Erivan. Within the last few months a concession has been signed, giving the right of extending this line to Tabreez in Persia, thus bringing the whole land trade of the East through Russia, and cutting it off from Turkey, and at the same time placing Persia immediately at the mercy of Russia, in case of any differences arising between them. This concession appears to have excited little observation; yet, both in a strategical and commercial point of view, it is the most important step which has been taken by Russia in the East during the last thirty years. For between Tabreez and Teheran and Herat, there is no engineering difficulty of the slightest importance in the construction of a railway. Moreover, Tabreez, although not the capital, is the largest town in Persia.†

While this rapid extension has been taking place towards the south, railways have been projected which will give another line of communication bearing upon Herat, by Orenburg, the Sir Darya, and the Oxus, and which only awaits the reports on the navigability of the latter river to be decided upon. M. Lesseps, encouraged by the Russian Government, has actually made preliminary surveys, with the view of continuing this railway to India. Baffled by the engineering difficulties of the Hindoo Koosh, he has announced that a practicable pass does exist into Cashmere by Kashgar and the Pamir steppes. Although the present independence of Kashgar, and the immense ranges of mountains that have to be traversed, do not

* To a great extent with English money.

† This has not escaped the attention of the present Government, and the concession for the Persian part of this railway has been refused. The Russian part is to be carried out.

make this discovery of any immediate strategical importance, provided that Kashgar's independence is maintained.

With regard to steam communication by water, the almost exclusive possession of the Caspian Sea held by Russia, in connection with her present railway system, and the natural advantages recently developed on the shores of the Caspian, must give her extraordinary power over Western Central Asia. For along the Persian shores of the Caspian there are only two good harbours, Ashourada and Reshdt, or more properly Enzelli. The Russians by the occupation of Ashourada have absorbed the one. Reshdt, by dredging away the bar, a simple engineering operation, would become one of the finest ports on the Caspian; but what object has Persia in undertaking such a work when no trade is permitted to her from her own northern ports? Russia, herself, does not hold the countries represented by the remaining shores. From the Astara river on the west to Kinderli, on the east, may be said to be in her occupation; but from Kinderli to the Attrek, with the exception of Fort Krasnavodsk and its magnificent harbour, she has no permanent port and no sovereignty; yet by a mere topographical assumption the whole of this country is held to be in her possession.

The Russian fleet on this sea is by no means the formidable flotilla which has been recently represented. The vessels and their armament are completely of a bye-gone type; but as no other war vessels exist on that sea, and none but Russian trade is permitted, they answer their purpose.*

* The fleet is composed of the following steam-vessels:—

	Horse-power.	Guns.	Tonnage.	Draught.	Built.
Tulen	40	1	206	6·25	1860
Burlak	30	..	54	2·5	1855
Kura	100	7	290	4·66	1862
Ural	100	7	290	4·66	1862
Nasr-edin Shah	160	8	537	7·	1855
Derbent	160	7	537	7·	1855
Verbend, Krasnovodsk	Useless.				
Persianud	60	5	409	9·	1857
Khivinetz	60	6	409	9·	1857
Bukharest	60	4	409	9·	1857

4 small steam-tugs. 3 steam-transports. 14 sailing transports, usually carrying 1 gun, and of very light draught of water. None of these vessels carry guns of large calibre.

In the meantime steamers of a class better suited for the transport of troops are springing up, through the Caucasian Mercury Company; and the discovery of immense supplies of naphtha in the neighbourhood of Baku, and its simple application to steam purposes has obviated the disadvantages which previously existed through the high price of coal.

The importance of this discovery, or rather the extension of what was previously a monopoly, may be judged from the following data:—Coal (anthracite from the Don) costs, at Baku, 4*l.* 3*s.* a ton. Naphtha, used for steamers, 16*s.* 6*d.* per ton. Only three tons of naphtha are burnt for every four tons of coal, and it is expected that the price of naphtha will fall at least one-half when the working is further developed, and proper steam appliances introduced.

The pure naphtha, as drawn from the wells, is not used; it is the refuse after distillation which is found so valuable for steam purposes. This is not highly inflammable, and its use seems perfectly safe and thoroughly under control. Vessels originally fitted for burning coal can burn this naphtha with very little alteration. The naphtha is forced into the furnace in the form of spray mixed with a jet of steam. One stoker is sufficient for a large steamer. All the engineers of vessels burning naphtha speak in the highest terms of this fuel. It is only reasonable to suppose that in the course of a few years the main trade of the Caspian will be almost entirely carried on by steamers, more especially as the sailing trade is peculiarly dangerous and uncertain, both from the sudden gales, which are common, the scarcity of good ports, and the gradually shelving nature of the shores, thus compelling vessels to anchor in shallow water with the obvious danger of being caught on a lee shore.

Although the Persian coast of Mazanderan would furnish any amount of timber peculiarly applicable to ship-building purposes, the Russians have no ship-building yard on the Caspian, and the small dockyard and arsenal at Baku is only used for repairs; the Russian vessels being floated down the Volga and over the bar at Astrakhan either on rafts, or, if of light draught of water, without ballast. When railway communication is opened from Russia to the shores of the Caspian, and also from Reshdt into Mazanderan in Persia, it

seems probable that Baku will become a great building centre for the Caspian.

The five principal Russian ports on the Caspian are, or will be, Astrakhan, Petrofsk, Baku, Ashourada, and Krasnavodsk. Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga, must always be of some importance, but the shallow water between it and the Caspian will hamper and curtail its trade, and the establishment of railway communication to Petrofsk or Baku will deprive it of its present importance as the only means of communication for heavy goods between Russia and the Caspian.

Petrofsk is an artificial harbour of no great extent, and its consequence will mainly depend upon the line taken by the railway.

Baku, a fine natural bay, fairly safe as a port, and capable of great improvement, the centre of the naphtha discoveries, and present seat of the naval dockyard and arsenal, seems destined to become the great western port of the Caspian. Ashourada, a small island in the south-east, commanding a most extensive, safe, but shallow anchorage, has already been described.

Krasnovodsk, on the eastern shore, is by far the finest natural harbour of the Caspian, perfectly safe, and with a draught of water of from 22 to 26 feet. Its importance will increase as Russia's possessions to the east become more consolidated. Near here the Oxus once ran into the Caspian; the old source is distinct, and it seems not only possible but probable that it will be used as a canal, or give a line for a future railway. Want of water has impeded the development of Krasnovodsk, but this difficulty is being gradually overcome. Naphtha is found in considerable quantities on the island of Cheleken, to the south of the entrance of the harbour. This island is now in possession of the Turkomans.

Thus, if the railways in contemplation are completed, this great inland sea, on which Russia is the sole and exclusive naval and commercial power, must give her the strategical and commercial command of Western Central Asia,

While during the last sixteen years Russia has been making such vast and extraordinary strides in her system of communication, what has been done by England, Turkey, or Persia, in facilitating communication between the west and east? The Euphrates Valley Railway scheme, for which a guarantee by

the British Government was asked, may be classed as an alternative scheme to the Suez Canal; and, had the latter proved an impossibility, it might have merited a certain consideration, although even then it would have been open to the very serious, if not vital, objection of the great unhealthiness of the Lower Euphrates during the greater portion of the year. But now that the Suez Canal is *un fait accompli*, and steamers, capable of carrying 2000 troops and all their material, can pass direct from England to India, the Euphrates Valley Railway, with its double embarkation, becomes a thing of the past. It meets no present want. It could scarcely be supposed that Turkey, whose financial position is such that railway communication between Constantinople and the rest of Europe is still incomplete, would lend herself to such a project. It was a mere high road to India, and gave Turkey no strategical advantage whatever in case of difficulties with Russia; and it followed a line where, for a considerable distance, water communication already existed. If Turkey were to lend herself to the construction of a railway in Asia Minor, it is evident that a line from Constantinople, which in case of war would enable her rapidly to concentrate her troops towards Erzeroum and on the Upper Tigris, and would open out her trade with the East, now flowing with such difficulty of land carriage by Trebizond or Samsoon, is what she most requires.

It has been urged that the alternative line to the Suez Canal by the Euphrates is still necessary, for that the rights of neutrals in the use of the canal would make it dangerous for England to trust to it in case of war, as communication might at any time be impeded by the wilful connivance of a neutral in any hostile design on the part of the other belligerent. But the Euphrates Valley scheme in itself, to be of use to England, assumes an alliance with Turkey; and, although it would be necessary, it would not be difficult to frame such arrangements with the Egyptian Government as would maintain the neutral character of the canal from any serious violation.

It might almost as plausibly be urged that, if the Euphrates Valley line were constructed, the Arabs might be bribed to destroy bridges, or impede the line in time of war. But if an alternative line would be advantageous to England, and if any line to the East implies an alliance with Turkey, why should

not such a line be adopted as would give active strategical advantages both to Turkey and England in case of war, since their interests in Asia would probably be identical, and a British guarantee be given to the undertaking? Such a line is not only in contemplation by the Turkish Government, but has actually been commenced. It has been opened from Scutari to Ismed, and from Ismed to Angora the works are being pushed on, and the idea is to carry on this line by Sivas and Mosul to Bagdad. Branch lines are contemplated, and are being surveyed, to Sinope and Samsoon on the Black Sea.

While these projects are being considered or executed in Turkey, what has been done by Persia?

A gigantic undertaking was projected by Baron Reuter, and a concession obtained from the Persian Government, which virtually placed the whole future of Persia in the hands of Baron Reuter. Baron Reuter applied to the British Government for such guarantees as were likely to make his concession a financial success. Had the British Government encouraged the undertaking on its own terms, it would have brought Persia completely under British influence, and prevented the possibility of Russian advances or projects in Persia, which could tell against India in the future. The concession was therefore naturally opposed by Russia; but it was also opposed by our own Government, and its financial prospects being thus destroyed, it has since remained in abeyance.

Two ideas were suggested by Baron Reuter. First, to construct a railway from Tabreez to Reshdt, from Reshdt to Teheran, from Teheran to Ispahan and south to Bushire. This line would be entirely to the strategical advantage of Russia. It would place Tabreez virtually in possession of Russia. The main line running almost due north and south would not facilitate English communication with India. As the southern portion of the line would present immense engineering difficulties, it is probable that the northern portion would be completed and the southern omitted; which would thus place Persia at the mercy of Russia in case of war, with no possibility of assistance being afforded from without.

But there is an alternative line which would be to the entire advantage of England strategically, and which could be constructed with much fewer engineering difficulties, and which,

believe, if English influence with Persia and Baron Reuter had been exerted, would have replaced the one suggested. This would make Ispahan a railway centre; and from it a railway would be carried south-west by Yezd to Bunder Abbas, west to Bagdad, and north to Tehetan.

Assuming that direct railway communication with India is desirable, and that for future purposes railway communication between Calais and Constantinople may be looked upon as certain, which would be the best line, having due regard to the strategical and commercial requirements of England, Turkey, and Persia, and also with a due consideration for the engineering difficulties which exist? It is not difficult to trace the course which such a railway should have. It would follow the proposed Turkish line from Scutari by Angora, Sivas, Diarbekir, to Mosul and Bagdad; thence, by Ispahan and Yezd, to Bunder Abbas; and from Bunder Abbas it would follow the coast as closely as possible to Kurrachee, so that any power in command of the sea could impede or destroy this line, if necessary.

This railway would unite both strategical and commercial advantages. As has been shown, it follows a line already projected in Turkey. The short connecting link with Persia could only be objected to through the existing jealousies between the Turkish and Persian Governments, which English influence would doubtless suffice to allay. The Persian line would follow the course I have suggested. The apparent and possible objection by the Persian Government is, that it leaves out Tabreez.

Tabreez is, perhaps, at present, the most important town in Persia, but it owes its importance to being on the highway of the great caravan trade that flows from the East through Trebizond, Samsoon, &c. It lies close to the Russian frontier. Thus, Persia is at present in the position of probably having her principal town in the hands of the enemy shortly after a declaration of war. But, if the line suggested were carried out, all the trade would naturally follow the railway. Tabreez would lose its importance, and Ispahan would recover its old and proper position as the capital of Persia.

The carriage of the Indian mails and passengers would be of so much importance, financially, to the Persian railways, that it must prove a great inducement to take any route proposed by the British Government. But the question of Persian railways

is now in such a condition that they must fall almost immediately either under English or Russian influence. It would appear that England has everything to gain by lending her sanction and encouragement to Baron Reuter's scheme, if carried out as proposed by her. English influence in Persia must enormously increase from the number of Englishmen employed on the railways. The lines would be virtually in the hands of Englishmen.

The objection which might be raised to the alternative plan proposed is that it assumes an alliance between England, Persia, and Turkey, in case of war. This objection must always exist to any through system of railway communication with India. But the line suggested has many strategical advantages, even assuming the treble alliance as improbable. Steam communication, both by Turkish and English vessels, exists from the mouth of the Tigris to Bagdad, and even to Mosul except in summer. Steam communication by the Euphrates is even easier than by the Tigris, and the distance between the two rivers at Bagdad is only about forty miles. Thus the strategical advantages would lie with England, in the case of a simple alliance with either of these two or of a joint alliance with both.

In face of the immense strides completed or making by Russia in railway communication for strategical purposes, the time has evidently arrived when England can no longer view any further advances with indifference, nor suffer the whole land trade of the East to leave its old channels, and flow through the territory of the great northern power.

Having pointed out the serious disadvantages that must arise from allowing Russia closely to approach Herat, and to exercise from there a direct influence upon our Eastern Empire, it will be necessary for us to consider the relative military strengths that could be brought to bear by both Russia and England in the East, in case of a war between those two countries.

Russia has recently adopted a system of general compulsory service on the Prussian model; but she has gone farther than Prussia. For the latter keeps her soldiers only three years in the ranks and four years in the reserve, afterwards passing

them into the Landwehr and Landsturm. But Russia keeps them six years in the ranks and nine years in the reserve, thus giving a longer training and eventually a larger reserve; and there can be little doubt that these trained men, on leaving the reserve, will (as in Prussia) be made available for the defence of the country as long as they remain serviceable.* It is calculated that in nineteen years the Russian army will have been raised by this system to nearly 3,000,000 trained soldiers, and this estimate does not include her frontier Cossacks, which number about 400,000 irregular cavalry. In the course of years when the Russian Landwehr and Landsturm are formed, this enormous force will be further augmented, and probably 3,000,000 will be available for offensive purposes, and properly supplied with that due proportion of cavalry, artillery, engineers and administrative train, without which numbers are useless.

Even at the present moment the numbers composing the Russian army are most formidable. The active force which could be placed in the field consists of 580 battalions of infantry and 32 of rifles, 56 regiments of cavalry, 1400 field guns and 400 mitrailleuse, 11 battalions of sappers, 1 company Turkestan sappers, 6 half-battalions pontooniers, 6 telegraph-parks. In addition to this force there are 80 reserve battalions of infantry, 56 squadrons of cavalry, 12 field batteries, 4 horse batteries, 4 battalions of sappers. There are besides 48 frontier battalions of infantry and 25 garrison battalions, with 91 companies of garrison artillery. The whole forming a force 1,130,000 men, and to these must be added between 300,000 and 400,000 Cossacks.†

The new Russian army organization is the most fearful embodiment of military power ever attempted by any nation. It involves the principle of universal obligatory service in the twentieth year, and some 700,000 youths annually attain this prescribed age. But the State claims the services of every man for 20 years, viz., 6 years in the ranks, 9 in the reserve, and 5 in the Landsturm (Opolchengi). Deducting 40 per cent. for

* There is every probability of the six years' service in the ranks being reduced. This will of course increase the army more rapidly and give a much larger number of men even than the present system.

† This force, under the influence of the new organization, is constantly increasing, and the Russian army is now larger than the numbers given above, which represented the army before the recent changes had begun to have effect.

physical or other unfitness, it leaves 420,000 men annually available. Of these the army only takes into its ranks about 150,000, leaving 270,000 in reserve. These 150,000 in 20 years would give 3,000,000 of trained men for the regular army, minus losses; and, in addition to this number, there are about 400,000 frontier Cossacks.

But, in reserve to this terrible force, there are the 270,000 annually drawn, but not passed into the ranks, which in twenty years will give an additional strength of 5,400,000, minus losses, untrained, or only partially trained, but liable to immediate service. The difficulty will lie in providing cadres and material of war for this huge force; but Russia is taking this difficulty in hand, and is already spending 30,000,000*l.* annually on her army. She is imitating the German system generally, and great reforms are being worked out,—not before they were wanted, for the Russian army at present, although even now most formidable in its numbers, is not in the most efficient state, either as regards its staff or the organization of its existing reserves, for immediate action. But every year will see this fearful force growing both in strength and in efficiency with giant strides.

What is the strength and composition of the British Army which could be opposed to this enormous force in defence of our possessions in the East?

Our army is divided into the Home, the Colonial, and the Indian. The two former and the latter are so dissimilar that they must be considered separately. The Home army consists of 77 battalions of infantry, 22 cavalry regiments, 340 guns. All this force would be available in case of emergency, as the militia could be embodied, and would replace them in the Home garrisons. Of the Colonial force of 21 battalions, at least 7 battalions from the Mediterranean garrisons would be available, as they might be replaced by militia, as they were during the Crimean War. This would give an available strength of 84 battalions, or the infantry of 4 corps. But what would be the state of efficiency of this very small army, if required for service?

A British *corps d'armée*, in time of war, is organized as follows, exclusive of depôts:—

	Officers.	Non-commissioned Officers and men.	All ranks.	Horses.				Guns.	General service waggons.	Carts.
				Officers' chargers.	Troop.	Transport.	Total.			
Staff	19	12	31	67	..	..	67	..	..	..
3 Divisions of Infantry	924	27,714	28,638	795	3,717	1,482	5,994	54	270	216
1 Brigade of Cavalry	96	2,068	2,164	271	1,604	158	2,033	6	37	3
Artillery—										
Reserve	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Regimental Staff	4	2	6	11	..	..	11	..	..	..
3 Batteries Horse Artillery	21	516	537	45	492	..	537	18	6	..
2 Field Batteries (16-prs.)	14	382	396	16	292	..	308	12	4	..
Army Corps Ammunition	18	516	534	21	528	..	549	..	87	..
Reserve, in 3 Divisions	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Engineers—										
Regimental Staff	2	1	3	5	..	..	5	..	..	..
1 Company and Field Park	6	209	215	11	79	..	90	..	3	..
1 Pontoon Troop	9	313	322	18	228	..	246	..	..	..
½ Telegraph Troop	6	143	149	12	90	..	102	..	..	..
1 Troop, Military Police	2	73	75	..	65	..	65	..	..	..
Control Department	27	277	304	50	..	164	214	..	16	5
Medical „	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Veterinary „	45	393	438	52	..	..	52	..	..	..
Chaplain's „	3	..	3	3	..	..	3	..	..	..
Bakery Train	2	218	272	..	..	201	201	..	5	5
Butchery „		52								
Total	1,198	32,889	34,087	1,377	7,095	2,005	10,477	90	428	229

This is the approved organization of a British *corps d'armée* in the field. The Medical Department is not filled in; naturally it would depend more or less upon the nature of the service; and it does not include the transport necessary for forming depôts of supplies and maintaining communications, but merely the transport actually belonging to the army, and which could not be drawn from the country in which the operations took place. By multiplying this table by four, and comparing it with our present strength, our existing deficiencies can be seen at a glance. But it will be necessary to deduct from the strength of the army 20 per cent. in the infantry, cavalry, artillery, &c., to account for recruits who would join the depôts, the sick, and men unfit for active service. This gives the following results:—

TABLE showing the numbers required to form 4 Army Corps, and also the number of Troops in Great Britain available for Active Service. Seven Battalions of Infantry from the Mediterranean are included, but Coast and Garrison Artillery are not shown.

English Army in Europe.	Cadres.			Officers.			Non-commissioned Officers, Rank, and File.			Horses.			Guns.		
	Required.	Available.	Deficient.	Required.	Available.	Deficient.	Required.	Available.	Deficient.	Required.	Available.	Deficient.	Required.	Available.	Deficient.
Infantry Battalions	84	84	..	2,604	2,207	397	89,544	54,076	46,283	4,190	..	4,190	..	..	..
Cavalry Regiments	24	22	2	648	613	35	14,928	11,735	5,540	14,472	7,481	6,991	..	..	..
Horse Artillery Batteries	16	16	..	112	108	4	2,752	2,460	784	2,864	1,808	1,056	96	96	..
Field Artillery*	44	40	4	308	257	51	8,092	6,204	3,128	6,464	3,560	2,904	264	240	24
Engineer Companies	16	40	..	80			2,976	2,951	..	736	..	736	..		..
Engineer Field Park	1	1	..	4			92			176					
Pontoon Troop	4	1	3	36	391	..	1,252	718	1,957	984	422	1,146	..	..	..
Telegraph Troop	2	1	1	24			572			408					
Infantry and Artillery Reserve Ammunition Column	12	..	12	72	...	72	2,472	..	2,472	3,036	..	3,036	..	..	..
Army Corps A Ammunition Reserve	4	..	4	72	..	72	2,064	..	2,064	2,196	..	2,196	..	..	..
Control	..	..	..	244	329	..	3,648	2,878	1,345	3,492	1,095	2,397	..	..	..
Army Police	..	..	..	32	..	32	1,168	..	1,168	1,040	..	1,040	..	..	..
Total	..	..	..	..	..	663	129,564	81,022	64,741†	40,058	14,366	25,692	360	336	24

Deficient
- 2 Regiments Cavalry.
- 4 Cadres Field Artillery Batteries.
- 3 Pontoon Troops.
- 1 Telegraph Train.
- 12 Infantry and Artillery Reserve Ammunition Column.
- 4 Army Corps A Reserve.

* By the present estimates 1 Horse Battery has been reduced, and 2 Field Batteries added.

† 20 per cent. deducted for sick and men under 20 years of age.

, Brigade Depôts not included, as they would form the only reserve for replenishing immediate losses.

Thus we find that in Cavalry we should be deficient of two regiments: in all 5540 men, and 6991 horses. As the cavalry regiments are now kept up as mere cadres and no reserve exists for this arm, and as it would certainly take eighteen months to complete and train the men necessary to increase them to a war strength, it follows that no British army of whatever strength could be placed in the field that would not be deficient in this arm, and thus incomplete as an army. And if the whole army were put in the field it would require two more regiments, the cadres of which do not even exist.

In the Artillery we see there would be a deficiency of 4 batteries, 24 guns, and 3912 men, and 3960 horses; and as no trained reserve exists, it would, as in the case of the cavalry, be eighteen months before the existing batteries could take the field in an efficient state, unless garrison batteries were drawn upon, in which case they would cease to be efficient. But not only are the batteries deficient in any reserve, but they have no ammunition columns; and guns without ammunition could be of little use. These necessary reserve ammunition columns, it will be seen, show a deficiency of 4536 men and 5232 horses.

In the Infantry there would be a deficiency of 46,283 men. To fill up this deficiency we have a reserve of 7500 trained men, and a reserve of 29,800 men from the militia, the latter necessarily only partially trained. In 1876, it is true, that the short-service men of 1870 will begin to pass into the reserve. But, in the course of six years after that date, even this reserve of trained soldiers, if not suffered to re-engage in large numbers, will only form a first reserve of about 36,000. With regard to the Engineers, we find that no sufficient force of trained men exists, and the companies have not the organization that would be required on service; and to give them this organization, as well as 1882 horses, 1957 trained drivers, pontooniers, and telegraph men would be required.

The Army Service Corps, without which it is evident no army could be fed or placed in the field, have no corps organization; and the deficiency in this branch, without any reserve, amounts to 1345 men, and 2397 horses.

No cadres of military police exist; and the deficiency would be 32 officers, 1568 men, and 1040 horses.

The total deficiency would amount to 64,741 men, and 25,692

horses, and the following cadres: 2 regiments of cavalry, 4 batteries field artillery, 3 pontoon troops, 1 telegraph troop, 12 infantry and artillery divisional reserve ammunition columns, and 4 army corps reserve ammunition columns. Of this deficiency not the least serious lies in the want of a reserve of horses. In 1873 a Royal Commission sat to inquire into the supposed dearth of horses throughout Great Britain and Ireland. Many skilled witnesses were examined as to the adequate supply of horses to complete the army in case of emergency. The late Surveyor-General of the Ordnance, the responsible officer for this supply, stated that, in the absence of any reserve, he considered it would be impossible to complete the army within any moderate time at any cost, and nearly all the skilled witnesses agreed with him. Nothing, however, has been done to remedy this defect. In addition to these deficiencies, the serious fact also remains that we have no reserve of trained young officers in case of war.

Yet, formidable as at present are these defects in our organization, sufficient to paralyze the effective action of the army for eighteen months, they are easily remediable at a comparatively small cost. They involve the addition of the cadres of two cavalry regiments, and the maintenance of all cavalry regiments at an increased strength; an increase of four batteries of artillery;* and the completion of the infantry reserves. Unless we are prepared to wait, the deficiencies in all the reserves can only be met by increasing the army for a time to a war strength, and then passing a number of men into the reserve. This should have been the prelude to the new reserve system.

The deficiencies in the Control Department and reserve ammunition columns might be met by enlisting men for one year's service, and eleven years in the reserve, liable to six weeks' training in each year. Highly-trained soldiers are not required for these corps.† The deficiency in horses might be met by passing annually a given number of trained cavalry and artillery horses into the Yeomanry, and by distributing the

* Now 3 batteries only.

† Of course a proportion of long service and highly trained men would be required; but a very slight training would be sufficient for the mass. And as these men would consist principally of drivers, small men now excluded from the army might be taken, and would be procurable in any numbers for one year's service in the ranks and eleven in the reserve.

draught horses bought for autumn manœuvres amongst the respectable farmers of the country, liable to recall for one month in each year, or altogether in case of emergency. Or by a system of registration, with a right to claim the horses so registered in time of war.

Even if these 84 battalions were complete with all their adjuncts of cavalry, artillery, &c., they would only form an army rather less in strength than that of Belgium and Holland, or of Spain. Yet, with the most gigantic Empire the world has ever seen at stake, an Empire that fleets cannot protect, we grudge the organization and that last million which would at least place this small force on an effective footing.

If we now turn to our Indian army, we shall find its condition equally unsatisfactory. The army of India comprises 50 European battalions of infantry and 144 native battalions; 9 European regiments of cavalry and 44 native, but all of only three squadrons each instead of four; 58 European horse and field batteries; 6 native batteries of 4 guns, and 2 native mountain batteries. This formidable force, if organized, could not probably, as at present constituted, place 30,000 men in the field and maintain them in time of war.* Like the Home army, it is a cumbrous and expensive force, but lacking the organization which is required to make it immediately effective as a war machine.

The regiments are under-officered and no reserve of officers exists. Moreover, they suffer from a superabundance of field officers and a paucity of captains and subalterns. The native officers are looked down upon by the men whom they command. The mixing together of different races in the same battalion has destroyed *esprit de corps*. The battalions vary in strength, but usually number from 600 to 700 men. No trained reserves of men exist.† Thus they could not be put into the field at a greater war-strength until fresh men had been enlisted and trained, and then the ranks would be so full of young soldiers that the whole could not be trusted.

* Of course by the destructive system of volunteering, and thus destroying the efficiency of the whole army in order to place a small force in the field, it might possibly be done; but this is not organization, and is unworthy of consideration.

† Men should be passed into a reserve before the completion of their time, and be available for recall in time of war to join the battalions for garrison service.

But the remedy for this state of the Indian native army is simple. The battalions should be linked so that one of the two could immediately be placed upon a war footing.* Each of two battalions should be composed of one class of men drawn from one of the most warlike of the many races under our rule, viz., Sikhs, Punjabees, Goorkhas, Rajpoots, Beloochees, Hazarahs, or other hill tribes. Each battalion should be formed with four double companies, each double company having a European captain and subaltern. The native officers should be taken partially from the higher classes of natives and subjected to a rigid system of military instruction and test examinations.

This would give 72 native battalions that could immediately be placed upon a war footing. These, combined with the 50 European battalions, and 4 which might be drawn from the nearest colonies and replaced by militia, would give infantry battalions for 6 corps.†

If we apply the same test as has been applied to the Home army, a most serious deficiency in artillery will be found, and nowhere is a high proportion of artillery more requisite than in the East.

Six corps would require—

	Required.	Available.	Deficient.
Infantry battalions.	126	{ 54 British 72 Native	Nil Nil
Cavalry regiments— 6 of 4 squadrons, or 8 of 3 squadrons	48	{ 43 Native 9 British }	Nil
Artillery— Horse batteries	24	15	9
Field „	66	43	23

* There could be no objection to such a system, as the regiments do not bear their ancient numbers.

† It is assumed that the militia would, as they have always done, volunteer to go wherever their services might be required. But it would be extremely desirable that the element of chance should cease to exist, and that the militia should be enlisted to serve abroad *in case of war*. Nothing would be more popular with the militia than thus to be made a part of the regular force of the country. It would release all our regular battalions in case of emergency, and make them available in the field; whilst the militia might also be used for keeping up communications and garrisoning fortified places, duties which absorb so many troops. It would, in fact, nearly double our available strength without any cost, and it would please everybody.

There would also be a deficiency of Engineers; but these would be natives, and easily raised.

It is not possible to apply to the Indian army the same rules for transport and commissariat which exist for the Home army; and we might be able to use natives for the Divisional and Reserve Ammunition columns. But all these questions should be carefully considered, and an organization adopted that would leave nothing to construct on the outbreak of war. When the Indian Mutiny was quelled, the question of the future number of European troops that should be always maintained in Hindostan was most seriously and impartially considered; and it was then laid down that India could never be really safe unless garrisoned by 80,000 British troops, and this number was determined upon. However, Indian Finance soon became an all-absorbing question; and so soon were the lessons of the past forgotten, and the deliberate calculations of military necessity ignored, that the number has already fallen to 60,000.

But, as has been shown, the only serious feature relative to the condition of the Indian Army lies in the paucity of artillery and reserves for the British infantry and cavalry. The rest is a question of organization rather than of expenditure, and the 32 batteries deficient, even on a war strength, would only give an addition of 5912 of all ranks, or little more than a fourth of the reduction which has been made from that number which in 1866 was considered as absolutely necessary for the maintenance of our Indian Empire. But a more serious question, as involving the efficiency of the Indian army, remains to be considered, viz., the dearth of horses which exists. The system of breeding from studs does not give a sufficient supply for times of peace, even with the present enormous outlay. Neither Australia nor the Cape could meet the demand that would be occasioned by war. But a vast and almost inexhaustible field of supply lies undeveloped amongst the Tekè Turkomans.

British agents stationed at Meshed and Hérat might purchase horses from that part of Turkomania at prices varying from 20*l.* to 30*l.*, which would be far superior, both in size and quality, to those now produced at so much trouble and expense, and they might easily be sent down by Afghan agents to Shikarpoor. In no country would

it be more easy to keep a reserve of horses for the cavalry and artillery.*

Having thus briefly traced the general, the geographical, and the military bearings of the Central Asian question as it more immediately affects us, the political bearings of the present situation both in Europe and in Asia now remain to be considered. And the politics of Europe ever have had and ever must have a direct effect upon Asia. That the position of Turkey must materially influence our attitude in the East is abundantly evident. That the respective relations to each other of the great European Powers, and more especially their good understanding with Russia on the Eastern question, must be important to us is also evident. And at no time has the situation appeared more difficult. The decadence of France, our former ally; the hostile feeling that must exist between her and Germany for years to come; the tearing up of the Black Sea Treaty by Russia, encouraged by an agreement with Germany; the apparent general understanding which exists between Russia, Germany, and Austria on the Eastern question; the unfortunate attempt made by this country to isolate herself from questions in which her interests are so serious; the want of organization for action which exists in our Home and Indian armies, and which is so well known throughout Europe;—all these points have tended to reduce our influence in the East to the lowest ebb, and to make the situation most difficult.

But a careful study of the political elements which are likely to influence the future would seem to show that if our policy is consistent and firm, this state of things must be only temporary.

Will Germany, with France ever ready to turn upon her, encourage and tolerate the immense extension of Russia's power, which her new military organization and constant onward progress, both in territorial acquisitions and in material prosperity, will inevitably give her within the next ten years? Whatever may be the good understanding between the two

* Even when the Indian cavalry soldier goes on leave he takes his horse with him, and maintains him at his own expense.

Courts, there are questions relating to the Baltic provinces and inimical feeling between the two nations, which do not point to a lasting understanding.

Will Austria also quietly see herself dwarfed by the power with whom her relations have so long been critical, and whose onward progress in Europe would so immediately menace her own frontiers?

Does it not seem more probable that these two powers will in the future really check, rather than encourage, any attempt at an extension of Russian territory in Europe? And will not a cordial understanding between them and England be more natural a few years hence, than their present apparent joint political action with Russia? *

Have we not really brought about our present isolation by our own policy? And is it unnatural that with great military interests in the East, but no military power to support them, we should have lost some of our influence over Eastern questions?

Other nations already see what we ourselves do not appear to realise, viz., that our fleets can have but little influence in our ultimate position in the East. And, if we turn towards Asia, we find the situation less encouraging than in Europe;—Afghanistan, after receiving large subsidies, constantly showing us that she does not admit any right of influence; Beloochistan as discontented and unsettled as ever; Persia so weak that she is influenced by whoever applies the greatest pressure, and convinced that Russia will act, but that England will not; the whole of the wild western tribes impressed with the same conviction; and Turkey on bad terms with Persia, and, having lost all confidence in our ability as well as our will to give her material support in case of difficulties with the great northern power, and seeing the isolation of her Christian subjects in Europe being so slowly but surely brought about by Russian influence.

What, then, should be the policy of England under circumstances so difficult and discouraging?

* This was written more than a year ago. The present crisis justifies the deductions then drawn. The more decided action of the present Government is already tending to modify the mistakes that have been made in past years.

Firstly, recognising the fact that the aggressive mania of 1837, and the helpless inaction of the last twenty years, have both equally failed, we should adopt a bold and decided line of action; at the same time avoiding all territorial acquisitions beyond the true boundary of Hindostan, which Nature has so distinctly marked. We should, however, obtain real possession of all the passes through which access to India is possible.

Secondly, we should claim and maintain a decided influence over all the powers of Southern Asia, instilling into their minds the fact that we seek no fresh territory, but that we are prepared to maintain their independence, if, in return, we may claim a preponderating influence over their councils.

Thirdly, we should exercise a direct control over Afghanistan and Beloochistan, enforcing, if necessary, our right to regulate the succession in the former country, and thus to quell for ever those internal disorders which have resulted, and must continue to result, from the present system of succession.

Fourthly, we should gain and maintain our influence over these countries, not by a policy of isolation, but by improving their means of communication, by developing railways, encouraging trade, facilitating intercourse, and thus breaking down the barriers of fanatic barbarism, which are so completely out of date in the rapid advance of modern civilization.

Fifthly, although we need not attempt to vie with the gigantic armies of our Eastern rival, we should maintain our existing force upon an effective footing, and draw such a line of demarcation between Southern Asia and the Russian territory as may, from natural difficulties to any advance, give us an equality of military power upon our own frontier. And how can such a policy be carried out?

The policy of inaction, signally as it has failed, has not been without its benefits. When we were ever conquering and annexing in Hindostan, it was difficult to persuade either Afghans or Persians that their own countries stood in no danger of a similar fate. But the rapid advances of Russia, and the evident dislike to annexation shown by England, have in reality, made all Southern Asia far more friendly to the latter than to the former. If Russian influence is more potent than ours, it is because they fear her more, and have ceased to believe in us as her equal. But, if they could see any reviving

indications of that power which they believed in so implicitly in past days, there can be little doubt not only that we should gain a preponderating influence, but that this influence would be unmixed with dread of annexation.

We have only to look back to the past to see how a timid policy has invariably failed in dealing with Asiatics, and how a bold one has always succeeded. When Herat was besieged by Persia in 1838, all the efforts of our own Minister to induce the Persians to retire were disregarded, although he actually proceeded to their camp before the city. But the despatch of a handful of troops, and the occupation of the Island of Karrack in the Persian Gulf, immediately induced the Persians to raise the siege, and to agree to our views.

Such instances might be multiplied indefinitely; and that even now any indication of strength on our part is immediately felt and appreciated throughout the East is evident from a comparatively recent occurrence. When Lord Mayo formed a camp of 12,000 men at Umballa, and, receiving Shere Ali, gave him to understand that England intended to take a more direct influence in the affairs of Afghanistan, the effect was extraordinary throughout Central Asia. Thirty rebel chiefs at once sent in their submission, and the impression upon all the border tribes was so great that the Russians became seriously uneasy.

The remodelling of the Indian army on an active footing, if coupled with a more decided policy, would doubtless still produce a great effect; and the occupation of Quettah, to which we have a treaty-right, and the maintenance of a division there on an active footing, would overawe both Afghanistan and Beloochistan, and make our counsels dominant in both countries. It has already been shown that Quettah occupies a most important strategical point, for it not only covers the entrance to the Bolan Pass from the west, but virtually commands both Afghanistan and Beloochistan; and its climate and many advantages point it out as the site for our most advanced post But the moral influence of its occupation would be immense. It is especially to be desired that Quettah should be occupied before Russia is in a position to make any forward movement upon Merv.

The importance of Merv has already been dwelt upon.

Unfortunately, from ignorance of its geographical and strategical features, that importance has been under-rated in this country; but I can only again affirm, as the accompanying maps will show, that the occupation of Merv by Russia would place Herat completely at her mercy. But, if Quettah were occupied by us, then any forward movement upon Merv might be met by a representation that it would compel us to advance to Herat; and Russia would never occupy Merv, if it involved such a contingency. But it is most important that Merv should be taken out of the region of uncertainty. To hand it over to Persia, or to urge Persia to re-occupy it, would be to place it always at the mercy of Russia, and to alienate the Tekè Turkomans. It would be much more expedient to endeavour to attach it and the Tekè Turkomans as a semi-independent state to Afghanistan. From my knowledge of the Tekès, I am convinced that this might be carried into effect. The Tekès are most anxious to become a dependency of England. They look upon Shere Ali as the vassal of England, and would gladly hail any position which would prevent them from falling a prey to Russia—an event which they consider imminent.

With Persia our policy is more difficult; but by encouraging trade and railways, lending officers to remodel her army, and, above all, pressing her to occupy and maintain her proper northern frontier, we should certainly acquire a predominant influence. Once let Persia believe that England has the will and the power to secure her independence, and she will naturally lean towards us; and the knowledge that England had virtually guaranteed Afghanistan from aggression, would prevent any of those attempts at encroachment upon Herat which were once so constant and so popular with Persian rulers.

Beloochistan can never be formidable to England; but it is an important outwork, lying as it does at the mouth of the Bolan. The occupation of Quettah would help to quell the present state of anarchy which prevails, and the country would form an excellent recruiting ground for our Indian army.

The position which England must occupy towards Afghanistan is one of considerable difficulty. It is useless to endeavour to conciliate the ruler of a country and bring him over to British views, when we know that his death will be the signal for civil war relative to the succession.

Nothing can be more humiliating than a study of our past policy in dealing with this country; nor is there any hope in the future, unless we boldly meet this succession difficulty and settle it once and for ever. Even if a campaign in Afghanistan became necessary, it would be cheaply purchased if this bar to any material progress were removed. And, if a campaign were ever undertaken, it should be made with an overwhelming force, and followed by an immediate evacuation of the country when its object had been accomplished. But our whole policy towards Afghanistan has fostered the evils which are ever so rife. Instead of encouraging British traders to open out the country to commerce, we have studiously prevented Englishmen from entering it. The Afghans may be fanatics, but they will ever make their religious prejudices subservient to their pecuniary interests. It should have been our policy to accustom them to the constant presence of Englishmen, and to prove to them that they derived an advantage thereby. Trade, roads, and eventually railways, should have been developed. English officers should have trained the Afghan army. The murder of an Englishman should have been followed by a large reduction of the subsidy, and we might then have been sure that summary justice would be executed on the offenders.* In the course of time fanatical feeling would die away, and the country, instead of being a prey to constant internal disorders, would begin to look to its material interests and the development of its resources.

We should, in fact, treat Afghanistan as we do the independent States of India.

Russia is now approaching so near that we cannot afford to leave this important outwork of India in a chronic state of anarchy. The difficulty must be met, and it should be met boldly. The first most important step in the pacification of this country would be the construction of a railway through the Bolan to Quettah, which should be carried on from there to Herat, and with a branch from Candahar to Caubul. Such a line would bring the whole trade from this part of Asia to Kurrachee, and its strategical importance would be immense.

* If a return could be furnished of the different subsidies paid to Afghanistan without producing any permanent advantage to this country, it should prove a warning to us in the future.

It would to a great extent neutralise the projected Russian line to Tabreez, by bringing trade to the south instead of through Persia to Russia; and (should it become necessary to preserve Afghan independence) it would enable us immediately to concentrate a force at Herat long before Russia could hope to occupy that all-important position by a march from the Oxus. But at present Russia, even at Samarcand, is nearer to Herat than we are at Shikarpoor. In a strategical point of view, this is of vital importance.

The question of Russian railways has been considered at some length in this paper, and the importance of the subject has been strongly dwelt upon. The magnitude of the question, indeed, cannot be exaggerated. It is only by means of railways constructed in British interests that we can hope to hold our own with Russia in the East. It is to railways that we must look as the great developing agency over that vast district which we do not wish to rule, but which it is so important that we should influence. And we must be prepared to look upon this question in a far broader and more statesmanlike point of view than that of its affording an immediate pecuniary return.

The importance of reorganizing our Indian Army, so as to give at least six corps (180,000) available for active operations, has also been strongly urged; and the necessity, moreover, of having four corps (120,000) fit for service abroad belonging to our Home army. This, in case of emergency with Russia, would enable us to bring a force of 300,000 men to bear upon the East.*

Although this force might seem utterly incommensurate as compared with the gigantic military power of Russia, a little consideration of the relative strategical positions in the East will prove that, provided the policy urged, and the system of railways suggested, were carried out, the advantages would probably remain with England. For, if the great belt of desert so repeatedly and emphatically indicated as a boundary line

* The population from which Russia draws her immense military strength is about 90,000,000. The population from which England might draw hers amounts to about 235,000,000. The revenue of the whole British Empire is nearly double that of the Russian Empire.

were established as such, England would, on the first movement of Russia through Persia, concentrate at Herat and at Ispahan, at both of which places she could supply her armies. And although Russia might have an immense superiority of force upon the Oxus, she could not, from the nature of the country and in the absence of a railway, supply a sufficient army to operate, with any chance of success, against a British force of 150,000 men concentrated at Herat, and in railway communication with India. Moreover, it must be remembered that, in addition to the forces mentioned, if the policy urged were carried out, we might have an immense addition of irregular cavalry, Afghans and Tekès, under British officers, who would harass the enemy's communications if he attempted an advance, and destroy all possibility of supplying his army.

If Russia, however, is permitted to continue her forward movement, and to construct railways instead of those which it is here urged should be constructed in British interests, all these conditions will be reversed, and the advantages which might lie with England will then, in a much greater degree, apply to Russia, since she would have larger forces at her command.

I have now briefly touched upon all the main questions, political, geographical, and military, which bear directly upon this important subject. The action which I have urged may be summarised as follows:—

I. A bolder policy.

II. The establishment of a desert boundary north of Persia and Afghanistan, by a Russian and English Commission.

III. The development of railways and extension of trade in those countries which lie on our side of this boundary, gauge being especially considered.

IV. The reorganization of the Indian Army and addition of Artillery, and the completion of the reserves of our Home Army.

V. The occupation of Quettah.

VI. The settlement of the Afghan succession, and the opening

out of that country by railways to trade. The occupation of both mouths of the passes leading to India, and the employment of British Officers with an Afghan or Turkoman frontier force, with Residents at Caubul, Herat, and Candahar.

VII. The supply of India with horses drawn from the Tekè Turkomans.

VIII. The settlement of the Merv difficulty, and the annexation of the Tekès, as a semi-independent state, to Afghanistan.

IX. That Persia should be urged to occupy and hold her proper northern frontier.

I would most strongly urge the absolute importance of at once meeting these questions, however difficult they may appear. England has interests at stake greater than ever fell to the lot of any Government in the past history of the world, the safety of an Empire of 193 millions, and the welfare of its people. The dangers threatening India are looming nearer and nearer, and nothing has yet been done to meet or to avert them. Whilst other nations are preparing by practical care and forethought for future eventualities, we have been living for the present, in a region of theory, and postponing the consideration of all unpleasant questions that involved bold political action, or an apparently unremunerative outlay of money.

Great empires, built up by energy and conquest, cannot be held and governed on such narrow views. The whole conditions of war have changed; campaigns are now decided in a few short weeks; and victory ever lies with those who have made the most careful preparation. To trust to hastily organized levies when the emergency arises, is to court defeat, for armies are only consolidated by patient care and skilful foresight.

In 1866 a Royal Commission wrote as follows:—

"Recent events, however, have taught us that we must not rely in future on having time for preparation. Wars will be sudden in their commencement and short in their duration, and woe to that country which is unprepared to defend itself against any contingency that may arise or combination that may be formed against it.

"The first duty of those who preside over the administration of the Army is to look to its constitution."

Since those lines were penned, another great nation has lain prostrate within a few weeks of the outbreak of war. Yet we still trust with blind confidence to that "silver streak" which only protects our own homes, and are content to leave the safety of the greatest Empire that the world has ever seen to the hazards of chance or the mercy of our enemies.

THE END.

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